

# The Myths of the Rus



Alexander Ivanovich Belov

**BERSERKER**

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## Annotation

This book tells the story of the ancient deities of the Indo-Europeans, who served as prototypes for the Slavic gods. The author analyses Russian myths and comes to a surprising conclusion: these myths reflect the actual state of affairs at the time they were created. Unfortunately, in our pragmatic age, nobody takes these myths seriously, yet they contain a treasure trove of invaluable information preserved and passed down to us by folk tradition.

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**Alexander Ivanovich Belov**

**‘THE ARYAN MYTHS OF THE RUS’**

## Chapter 1. THE SECRET MYTH OF THE RUS

This chapter tells of Solovey the Robber, of Perun — the great god of thunder, of Elijah the Prophet, who succeeded Perun, of rain-making rituals, of Veles — the god of all Rus, of fertility rituals, of the bear's wedding, Belobog, and the idea that a bull's face with horns is not always a bad thing, as well as the notion that the Giant from Russian fairy tales might have been a Cro-Magnon.

### *THE NIGHTINGALE-ROBBER*

In the Russian epic, it is said of him:

‘The Nightingale the Robber sits by the river on three oaks, on nine branches.

No falcon flies past those oaks, no beast runs past, no reptile slithers past...

The Nightingale heard the gallop of a horse, as Ilya Muromets rode by; he rose up on the oaks and cried out in a terrible voice:

‘What sort of fool is riding past here, past my sacred oaks? He won't let the Nightingale the Robber sleep!

And as soon as he whistles like a nightingale, roars like a beast and hisses like a snake, the whole earth trembles, the hundred-year-old oaks sway, the flowers fall, and the grass lies flat...

And Ilya sat in the saddle, not moving a muscle, not a strand of his fair curls stirring...

The Robber Nightingale was surprised and poked his head out of the nest. And Ilya, without a moment's hesitation, drew his powerful bow, released a sharp arrow—a small arrow, weighing a pood.

The bowstring whistled, the arrow flew, struck the Nightingale in the right eye, and flew out through the left ear...’

The Duel Ilya Muromets and Solovey the Robber ends in Ilya's victory. The Nightingale is defeated, cut to pieces and burned.

In this epic researchers see a connection with epic Old Russian legends about the duel between the Thunderer and the Serpent.

The very name

— Nightingale, read backwards, clearly points to the serpentine adversary of the thunderer Perun Volos.

### **PERUN**

In Great Rus', Perun is the god of storms, lightning and thunder. V.I. Dal writes of him as follows:

*'In Belarus, he is a tall, broad-shouldered man with a bald head, black hair, black eyes and a golden beard; in his right hand he holds a bow, in his left a quiver of arrows; he rides across the sky in a chariot, shooting fiery arrows'.*

Perun strikes his sworn enemy Veles—who has stolen Perun's cattle—with a 'thunderbolt'. Veles tries in vain to hide from the 'thunderbolts' in trees, stones, people, animals and water. It is only in the underworld that Veles finds refuge.

Peasants in the Tver Governorate were still saying the following at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries:

*'If God strikes a tree with lightning, it is because he wishes to destroy the devil hiding in its branches. If lightning strikes a person, it is only to kill the devil hiding within them. For this, He rewards the slain in the afterlife.'*

In the 17th century, Adam Orle Arius wrote in *\*A Journey to Muscovy and Persia\**: 'The people of Novgorod, when they were still pagans, had an idol called Perun, that is, the God of Fire, for the Russians call fire "perun". On the spot where their idol once stood, a monastery was built, which retained the idol's name and was called the Perun Monastery. This deity took the form of a man holding a flint in his hand, resembling a thunderbolt (lightning) or a ray of light. As a sign of worship to this deity, a fire was kept burning day and night, kindled from oak wood. And if the priest in charge of this fire, through negligence, allowed it to go out, he was punished by death.'

## ***PERUN'S SANCTUARY***

Such notions of Perun's 'unquenchable fire' are also corroborated by archaeological evidence. In the mid-20th century, V.V. Sedov excavated a circular site near Novgorod in the Permny tract, featuring a post hole in the centre. Surrounding the site was a ditch with eight extensions, which, according to scholars, served as fire pits for kindling fires.

It is known that in Novgorod, as in Kyiv, idols of Perun stood on hills. Thus, in the Third Novgorod Chronicle (988), we read: '... and he destroyed the sacrificial altar and cut down Perun, which stood on Peryna in the great Novgorod.' It is clear that Sedov discovered the ancient sanctuary of Perun referred to in the chronicle.

An idol of Perun stood on the hill in Kyiv as far back as the time of Prince Igor. As the chronicle of 945 reports: 'The next day, Igor summoned the envoys and went up to the hill where Perun stood, laying down his weapons, his shields and his gold...'. The text then goes on to describe the oath sworn by the Rus' as they concluded a treaty with Byzantium. In accordance with custom, the Rus' swore by their gods — Perun and Veles.

The Lithuanian god of thunder, Perkūnas, according to legend, also lived on a high mountain, which was called Perkūnas Mountain.

## ***PERUN'S OAK, PERO AND TABU***

Of the animals, the horse was dedicated to Perun, and of the trees, the oak. Throughout the entire region inhabited by the ancient Slavs, there are known names of hills and mountains called 'Perun's'. The names 'Perun's Grove' and 'Perun's Oak' are also known. It was in such places that Perun's sanctuaries were located. Thus, a deed of gift dated 1302 from the Galician prince Lev Danilovich states: '... and from that mountain to Perun's Oak, the slope of the mountain was part of the estates of the Bishop of Przemyśl'. As we can see, even the estates of bishops could be bounded by pagan place-names.

Explaining the meaning of the word 'ierun' presents some difficulty for modern researchers. For instance, V.I. Dal cites

some well-known expressions on this subject: ‘May a thunderbolt strike you!’, ‘All around him, from the clouds, thunderous peruns flash’. Dal cites cognate words: ‘peret, popirat, prya’. Indeed, expressions such as ‘where are you rushing to?’, ‘to fix one’s gaze’, ‘to lunge with a knife’ have survived. Clearly, these point to a semantic closeness to the forgotten word ‘Perun’.

Some researchers suggest that Perun derives from the word ‘pero’ (feather), hence ‘pernatyi’ (feathered). It is thought that in ancient times Perun was not depicted as a human but as a bird (a similar figure: the Firebird).

However, other researchers point out that the word ‘Perun’ is an onomatopoeic representation of the sound of thunder. As evidence, they cite the Slavic equivalents of Perun: Pereruna, Pereruga, Preperuda, Priorush. Evidently, the true name of the God of Thunder was considered taboo.

#### **‘PERUN’S ARROWS’ AND ‘BLUE BERETS’**

Perun’s main weapons were arrows and axes, as well as Perun’s stones (among the Poles), now known as belemnites. From the perspective of ancient Orthodoxy, all these objects of pagan worship were termed ‘god-abhorrent things’. Meanwhile, weapons held great value for ancient warriors. Even in the Indo-European tradition, the god of thunder was endowed with a military role. In Rus’, he was regarded as the patron of the military retinue and its leader — the prince.

In the Christian tradition, Perun’s functions were partly transferred to Elijah the Prophet. It is no coincidence that this saint is still regarded today as the patron of paratroopers. Perhaps it is no coincidence that paratroopers bathe in fountains on their day. In doing so, they unwittingly revive the ancient tradition of the blessing of the waters on Elijah’s Day. The ‘fist fights’ that paratroopers also regularly organise are reminiscent of the ancient games for young men held in honour of Perun.

Originally, in ancient iconography, Elijah the Prophet was depicted on a chariot or on horseback. He strikes down his serpentine enemy—who corresponds to the ancient Veles, and in later versions of the myth, to Zmiulan—with his fearsome weapon. Thus, Ilya Muromets

from Russian epics has every chance to be regarded the successor to the Old Slavic Perun.

### ***PERUN AND ILIN DAY***

The day of the Old Testament prophet Elijah is known as Ilyin Day. It is celebrated on 2 August according to the new calendar, and was celebrated on 20 July according to the old calendar. Peasants tried not to work on this day. They believed that anyone who broke this taboo would be struck by lightning. On this day, they would bring a lamb's leg, fresh honey, ears of fresh rye and green peas to the church as offerings. Water was consecrated on this day. Rituals involving the dousing of women with water were often performed. According to historians, these rituals essentially trace back to pagan cults associated with summoning rain and even human sacrifice. After St. Elijah's Day, bathing was forbidden. To this day, rituals for summoning rain are still practised in some places. To this end, a snake is caught, cut open lengthways and hung from a tree. In these rituals, one can glimpse, as in a drop of water, a belief in an ancient myth. The person who kills the snake is likened to God, who slew the serpent. Like attracts like. And the rain falls. Sometimes, to bring rain, a bonfire is lit at the edge of a field and the slain snake is thrown into it. Evidently, such actions re-enact an ancient ritual of worship of Perun.

### ***VELES***

Veles was regarded as the God of All Rus'. Veles's adversary was Perun. He was the patron of the prince's retinue. Weapons were dedicated to Perun, whilst gold and wealth were dedicated to Veles.

One Old Russian chronicle contains a miniature depicting the scene of Prince Oleg's retinue taking an oath. The retinue members swear by the gods Perun and Veles. The former is depicted as an anthropomorphic idol. The latter is depicted as a serpent lying at his feet.

A similar interpretation is found in later iconographic images, where a horseman on a white horse tramples and pierces a defeated serpent with a lance. This image is well known to us in the form of St George the Victorious, depicted on the coat of arms of Moscow.

Meanwhile, in ancient times, the image of the serpent did not evoke negative associations. It symbolised wealth and fertility. For example, in the Smolensk region and elsewhere in Rus', people wore gold serpent-shaped amulets on their wrists.

### ***HAIR***

In the Volga region, the image of Veles as a bear was once widespread. This is probably where his name Volos — meaning 'hairy' — comes from. Right up until the 19th century, a custom persisted in Rus' of leaving a few ears of grain unharvested at the edge of the field after the harvest. These were called 'Volos's beard'. At the same time, they would say: 'Twist the beard of Volos, or Veles, as some call him.'

The ritual itself involved twisting the unharvested ears of corn into a rope or plaiting them into a braid, then pressing them to the ground with a stone or burying the upper part of the stalks near the roots. This ritual symbolised the return of the earth's fruits to the earth. The sacrifice was intended to ensure a good harvest for the coming year. A similar ritual was practised in the Novgorod Governorate in the late 19th century.

Many rituals designed to ensure fertility and wealth are timed to coincide with Maundy Thursday (during Holy Week). It is evident that in ancient times, the day of Volos was celebrated on these spring days. In the Oryol Governorate on Maundy Thursday, women spun thread, wove, and sewed. Using thread spun the night before, the lady of the house would wrap the wrists of all family members so that no one would fall ill throughout the year. The same thread was carried three times around the house to protect the livestock.

### ***VELES, 'VELE' AND FERTILITY RITUALS***

On Maundy Thursday, round pancakes and fritters were baked, taken to the barn and fed to the livestock. Undoubtedly, pancakes and fritters once symbolised the Sun, awakening nature after a long winter. It is quite possible that in ancient times, Veles symbolised the Sun's annual journey across the sky. In that case, the god's name — in the sense of **'vele' meaning** 'to rotate' — takes on a different meaning. Perhaps modern compound words containing 'vele', such as 'bicycle', serve to conceal from us the true, original meaning of the sacred name Veles.

In days gone by, the New Year was celebrated in Rus' in the spring. And the calendar was called **the 'Veles Calendar'**.

In ancient Russian written sources, Veles is often referred to as the 'god of cattle' — the patron of livestock. In the Grodno Governorate, 'Veles Day' was celebrated on a Thursday during Shrovetide. In the Vitebsk region, 'Volos' was celebrated on St Basil's Day (28 February). On this day, working cattle were given a rest from labour, and in the evening, people would ride around a young bull. Eating meat was usually forbidden during Shrovetide. However, an exception was made on this day. Meat dishes were prepared. Neighbours were invited over. After the feast, the men and women would begin to wander around the village so that, according to custom, the men might have livestock and the women might have flax.

#### ***HAIR WAS CUT IN RUSSIA ON MAUNDY THURSDAY***

In the Vitebsk region at Easter, peasant women with grown-up children would comb their hair so that they might have as many grandchildren as there were hairs on their heads.

Everyone is familiar with the custom where, at the wedding feast, the newlyweds are seated on a fur coat turned inside out. They also prepare the wedding bed by placing a fur mat underneath it. This was done so that the young couple would be wealthy and have many children.

In the Vladimir region, the first egg laid by a young hen was rolled three times over the child's head, whilst saying: 'Little hen, little hen, lay as many eggs as there are hairs on Vanya's (Tanya's) head'.

In the Moscow Governorate, a newly purchased cow was fumigated with locks of hair cut from all members of the family. In the Vologda Governorate, the umbilical cord of a newborn was tied with a thread twisted from strands of the mother's hair.

On Maundy Thursday, peasants observed the custom of cutting the hair of both people and animals. In Central Russia, on this day, the hair of children who had turned one year old was cut. On this day, girls would cut off the ends of their braids. Farmers would shear the hair from the foreheads of cows, horses and sheep, and trim the tails of hens. This was understood as a ritual sacrifice.

All these rites and rituals were, in one way or another, connected with Volos and with fertility rituals.

#### ***'VOLOSEN', THE BEAR AND THE WOODSPIRIT***

In later tradition, Volos is perceived as a 'ferocious beast', a 'devil'. Hence his Kostroma dialect nickname 'ele' — a wood spirit, a devil, an impure being. (The word 'leshy' itself is evidently derived from the word 'Veles'.) In Rus', another nickname for him was also widespread — 'volosatik', 'volosen'. This is cognate with the Czech 'veles' — 'evil spirit', 'demon'.

Meanwhile, some of Veles's functions, as the patron of livestock, were 'transferred' to St. Vlas. Icons of this saint often depict a humanoid creature with a bear's head. This is clearly a legacy of pagan rituals, when a bear's head and paws were hung in the barn as an amulet to protect the livestock and ensure a good litter. On St Vlas's Day, in some 'bear corners' of Rus' right up until the 19th century, a specially chosen unmarried young man would don a bear's head and paws and accept offerings. An unmarried girl would be 'given' to the 'Master'. This ritual was meant to symbolise prosperity and happiness in the New Year.

In some parts of Russia, a different custom prevailed. On Ivan's Day, the man of the house would rise before sunrise and go to the livestock yard, where he would don a bear's head and paws and

walk among the domestic animals in this guise, growling like a bear. This was meant to protect the livestock from bear attacks. To ensure the cows gave milk, one had to scratch their udders with a bear's paw.

Here we see a very close intertwining of the cult of St Blaise with the veneration of the bear as the 'master'.

### ***THE BEAR'S WEDDING...***

People used to say: 'the bear is the forest spirit's own brother'. Sometimes the bear itself was called a 'leshak' or 'forest devil'. Yet the attitude towards the bear was by no means negative, as it might seem at first glance.

In the popular imagination, the bear was seen as a symbol of the groom. If a young woman dreamt of a bear, it meant a wedding was imminent. This belief is confirmed by a Belarusian proverb: 'The shaggier the bear, the richer the groom'. In the Ryazan and Nizhny Novgorod provinces, at wedding feasts, people would shout: 'There's a bear in the corner!' The bride was supposed to reply: 'I love Pyotr Ivanovich!' and kiss the groom. At weddings, people usually sang:

*A panting bear swims down the river;*

*Whoever he puffs on in the yard, that one becomes the son-in-law in the bower.*

The image of the bear is a common feature in folk tales. For example, in the fairy tale 'Ivan the Bear's Ear', Ivan travels to the far-off kingdom riding a bear.

The image of the bear was widely used not only during wedding ceremonies, but also during funeral rites. According to archaeological excavations, bear bones and paws, as well as clay depictions of bear paws and heads, have been found in Neolithic burials and later ones (around the 1st millennium AD) in the Russian North, as well as in Scandinavia and the Baltic states. Similar finds associated with the bear cult have been discovered in the Yaroslavl, Vladimir and Suzdal regions in burial mounds dating from the 8th–9th centuries. Evidently, the bear served as a guide to the afterlife.

## ***TOPTYGIN — ‘THE WEDDING GENERAL’***

The use of the bear as a ‘wedding general’ and guide to the afterlife is by no means coincidental. The Rus’ people believed that the bear had once been human, for, like humans, it eats bread and loves vodka; it has no tail, and it can walk and dance on its hind legs. It was believed that if you removed a bear’s skin, it would look like a human. The male resembles a man, and the female a woman. According to folk beliefs, a bear looks after its cubs and strives to ensure they receive

a ‘human’ upbringing. According to folk beliefs, a bear can grieve and rejoice just like a human. In the Olonets Governorate, as well as in other regions during the 19th and 20th centuries, folk tales were recorded about the transformation of ancient people into bears. A Ukrainian folktale recounts the origin of bears as follows: ‘Once upon a time there lived a very ‘old man’ who first made man a god, and then a bear. From that first bear, all bears came to be.’

‘The bear is a gift from God!’—as they used to say in Russia.

It should be noted that from a scientific perspective — that of comparative morphology — the bear’s closeness to humans is not such a scandalous notion. In male bears, just as in men, the testicles are located in the scrotum. A bear’s foot resembles a human foot. A bear’s molars have flat crowns and resemble human molars. The cave bear had a skull with a steep forehead, a feature not found in other animals.

Evidently, these considerations served as the basis for imposing a taboo on the name ‘bear’. In popular parlance, the bear is referred to as: ‘he’, ‘Sam’, ‘the Master’, ‘the Shaggy One’, ‘the Club-footed One’, ‘the Shaggy-haired One’, ‘the Oat-eater’, as well as ‘Mikhail Ivanovich’, ‘Toptygin’, ‘Potapych’ and ‘Misha’.

The special reverence for the bear in Russia is also reflected in the names of the constellations: Ursa Major and Ursa Minor. It is also quite intriguing that the constellation Ursa Major was known to the Aryans who migrated from the Central Asian steppes to Iran and India. They are mentioned in the Avesta as the seven rishis (sages).

## ***‘VELES’ GRANDSON’ AND ST VLAS***

In *\*The Tale of Igor's Campaign\**, Bayan is referred to as 'Veles's grandson'. According to researchers, this may indicate a connection between the cult of Veles and ritual songs, storytellers and folk poetry.

The significance of the name Veles for the ancient Rus' people is evident from its clear connection with the word 'Great'. In V.I. Dal's dictionary, one can find the Old Russian pronunciation and spelling of the verb 'velikiy' — 'veliy'. A certain similarity with the name Veles can also be seen in the noun 'Povelitel' (Ruler). Evidently, for the ancient Rus' people, the significance of the name Veles was far greater than it is for us today.

With the adoption of Christianity, attitudes towards Veles changed. According to one of the oldest manuscripts of the Life of Vladimir (1492), the Grand Prince *'having entered Kyiv, ordered the idols to be overthrown and smashed; some were thrown away, others were burnt, and the idol of Volos, whom they called the god of cattle, he ordered to be cast into the Pochaina River'*.

As early as the 12th century, churches dedicated to St Blaise were erected on the sites of the pagan shrines to Volos in Novgorod, Kyiv and Yaroslavl. The Volos-Nikolaevsky Monastery was founded on the site of the Volos sanctuary on the Kolochka River. This monastery housed a miraculous icon of St Nicholas, which, according to legend, appeared on a tree, hanging by its hair.

## **VELES AND BALDA**

It is probably no coincidence that Veles — the 'god of cattle' — was depicted as a bear and a snake. It was precisely the bear and the snake that posed a real threat to livestock. Securing Veles's support through magical rituals meant protecting the livestock from all manner of calamities—drought, pestilence and accidental death.

Shepherds had incantations for the event that a bear should emerge from the forest towards the herd. The shepherd would lie face-down on the ground and repeat the incantation. In doing so, the cows would appear to the bear as stones, and he would leave them alone.

Furthermore, Veles is a god who embodies the forces of fertility. The image of the snake has long held phallic symbolism. Perhaps words such as ‘to drag oneself along’, ‘scoundrel’, ‘attraction’ and so on share a common root with the word Veles. The expression ‘that is how it has always been in Russia’ conjures up the image of the ‘serpent of time’.

In days gone by, spring rituals were widespread, during which peasants would perform ritual intercourse on ploughed fields, invoking the names of the gods to ensure a good harvest. It is possible that swear words with the root ‘bal’, which have survived to this day in the Russian language, can be traced back to the name of an ancient Indo-European god of fertility. The consonant ‘v’ is replaced by ‘b’ in vowelisation. Well-known words such as ‘balda’, ‘baldet’, ‘obalduy’, ‘oboltus’, ‘balbes’, ‘balovat’, ‘lobotryas’ (‘lobkotryas’), ‘b-d’ (a woman of ill repute) and so on point to an undeniable connection between the root ‘bal’ and the theme of fertility...

The word ‘volya’ (will) is closely related to the word ‘povelitiel’ (ruler). As the saying goes: ‘To the free, freedom; to the saved, paradise.’ Among other things, the words ‘volya’ and ‘povelitiel’ share the root ‘vol’, which means ‘bull’.

### ***BELOBOG, BELUN AND VALU***

In Western Slavs there was deity Belobog — who personified good fortune and happiness. Experts associate the name of this god with the name of Mount Belobog among the Lusatian Serbs. In the same region there was also a mountain, called Chernobog.

Evidently, Belobog personified the ‘White World’, whilst Chernobog represented the otherworld. Folk tales feature similar characters, such as Belomor and Chernomor. In ancient times, the Western Slavs referred to the Baltic Sea as the White Sea. The ‘white-burning stone’ from Russian legends also evokes certain associations with Belobog — the sun of good fortune...

Among Belarusians, legends have survived about Belun — an old man with a white, grey beard, dressed in white. The old man leads those who have lost their way out of the forest, as evidenced by the saying: ‘It is dark in the forest without Belun.’ Belun is also considered a bestower of wealth and good fortune. If a peasant begins to grow rich, people say of him: ‘The man has become friends with Belun’

has become friends'. Folktales describe encounters with Belun. He asks to have his nose scratched. After which he bestows gold coins.

### **VELNYAS AND VALU**

Some researchers identify Belobog with the Indo-European deity Valu, with the subsequent transformation of Valu into Bel. Valu hides livestock in mountain caves from the thunder god Indra. However, Indra destroys the caves by hurling thunder and lightning, and frees the livestock. The term 'Valu' was also used to refer to a fence for livestock. This myth allows us to reconstruct the common origin of Valu and Veles.

In Lithuanian pagan mythology, which was strongly influenced by Christianity, there existed a character named Velnias (Velnyas, Vyalnas, Velinas, Velns) (Lithuanian *velnias*, *velinas*; Latvian: *veins* — 'devil') — in Baltic mythology, a demon and the adversary of the thunderer Perkūnas. The plot of the myth is as follows. Velnias steals livestock from Perkūnas, then hides from his pursuer, transforming first into a stone, then into a tree, then into a snake, and finally into a human. Perkūnas strikes the stone, the tree, the snake and the human with lightning in order to kill the enemy hiding within them. Eventually, the thunderer strikes him with lightning and recovers the stolen livestock. Fertile rain falls, causing all of nature to come to life. This myth is found among the Baltic Slavs. For instance, the Latvians have since ancient times called the lakes and ponds in the marshes 'the eye of Velnyas'. The connection between this myth and the Indian and broader Indo-European myths is evident.

### **A BULL'S HEAD WITH HORNS — NOT ALWAYS A BAD THING...**

Sometimes Velni was depicted with the attributes of cattle. He would have a bull's head, horns and hooves. These are the well-known attributes of the devil. A mask of a bull's head with horns, placed on a person's head, was in former times more a symbol of a deity than

a demon. Some remnants of ancient rituals can be seen in the performances of mummers during the Christmas season.

Meanwhile, the Velnas of folk lore is not nearly as demonic as he might seem. He is endowed with wisdom (compare the expression: ‘the wisdom of a snake’), is the patron of music and dance, and often competes with shepherds. A similar motif is found in Greek folklore. Velnas often seduces girls and women, abducting them. Children born of such unions are very strong and tall. Such children are adept with bow and arrow almost from infancy and carry them on their stomachs. Folk tradition advises mothers who recognise the signs of a demonic child to kill them.

In these beliefs, we see a kind of paraphrase of medieval European notions of a demon who seduces women. Women were instructed to kill such a child.

Meanwhile, it should be borne in mind that the Lithuanian capital is called Vilnius, which undoubtedly suggests that in days gone by, Velnas was held in high esteem and respect by the people. It is unlikely that anyone in their right mind would have named a city after a demon.

### ***IS A GIANT A CRO-MAGNON?***

Velnyas was often depicted as a giant endowed with supernatural strength. The Russian word ‘velikan’ itself is homophonous with the name of the ancient god. It is not impossible that Velnyas had a real-life prototype.

In the north of Eurasia, even before the Europeans arrived, Cro-Magnons lived there — tall, strong people. They differed significantly from Europeans in appearance and manner. They were of a fierce disposition. This is evidenced by European legends of man-eating giants living in the forest wilderness.

According to data from the renowned anthropologist, Dr M.M. Gerasimov, Doctor of Historical Sciences, the remains of Cro-Magnons were buried on Yuzhny Island in Lake Onega during the second millennium BC.

Similar burial sites containing Cro-Magnon-type remains are also found in Western Europe. Evidently, Cro-Magnons lived side by side with Europeans for millennia, which gave rise to the legends of giants. It is not inconceivable that Cro-Magnons abducted girls and women and made them their concubines. This gave rise to mixed-race individuals possessing so-called 'hybrid strength'. It can be surmised that the prominent brow ridges of Scandinavians, their tall stature, and red (fiery) hair are traits partly inherited from the ancient Cro-Magnons of Europe.

### **VELES AND BEELZEBUB**

It is also interesting to note the phonetic similarity between the name Veles and the names of Indo-European, Akkadian and Semitic deities sharing the root

'Bel'. Among the Semites, there was a deity named Balu (lord, master). Fertility rituals were associated with him. This deity was depicted wearing a phallic-shaped headdress. There is also the Semitic deity Baal-Zebul (from which the biblical name Beelzebub derives). This deity was depicted in the form of a bull. In Akkadian mythology, there was a deity named Bel or Beloe — the lord of the world. This deity was also depicted in the form of a bull or as a man with a bull's head. The legend of the thunderer Balu is known among the Hittites. In Egypt, Baal is identified with Set. Among the Greeks, a similar deity is known by the name of Baal. This is clearly the origin of the word 'phallus'. In Syria, from the end of the 2nd millennium BC, the worship of Baal-Haddad was widespread. Among the Phoenicians in the 1st millennium BC — Baal-Adira. Among the Serbs, there was a New Year's custom of burning a 'Badnyak' in the form of a log. The burning was accompanied by a magical incantation wishing for an increase in livestock. The number of sparks was used to divine what the offspring would be like.

It cannot be ruled out that there are phonetic and semantic parallels between the names of these ancient deities and the Slavic Veles. This may point to a common origin for deities associated with the theme of fertility.

### ***VELIAL, AS A NON-EXISTENT ADVERSE TO GOD***

It is quite curious in this regard that in Judaism and Christianity there is a figure known as Belial (Belial) — the spirit of non-existence and destruction. It is believed that the name Belial in Judaism was used to denote foreign gods. In the Bible, Belial is associated with the evil spirits of pagan myths. Furthermore, he acts as a tempter of mankind, pushing people towards crime. In the Synodal Translation of Psalm 100/101, 'the work of Belial' is called 'an abominable thing'. Belial recruits those he has led astray into the ranks of the so-called 'sons of Belial'. He turns a person, as it were, into a little Belial, led by the commander of the host of darkness. In Jewish apocalyptic literature, Belial appears as the leader of the 'hosts of the sons of darkness' whom he has led astray. This interpretation can be traced in the Qumran text bearing the eloquent title: 'The Warrior of Light against the Sons of Darkness', as well as in the 'Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs'. A similar interpretation is also found in the New Testament. The believing Christian is called upon to 'maintain the steadfastness of a spiritual warrior standing against the whole world'. The authors of the New Testament rhetorically ask: 'What does light have in common with darkness?'

What harmony is there between Christ and Belial?' In fact, Belial acts as the principal adversary of Jesus Christ. However, Belial cannot be identified with Satan, for he is devoid of personal qualities. As S.S. Averintsev wrote: 'The defining characteristics of Belial are non-existence, emptiness and insubstantiality'.

## Chapter 2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MAIN MYTH

This chapter discusses the Bull and the Sun; the cult of the bull; the meaning of the words 'buiy tur'; the similarities between the calf and Govinda; Zoroaster's bull; the symbolism of the struggle between the bear and the bull; when 'good' and 'evil' first appeared; what is meant by 'Div calls from the top of the tree'; Mother Earth; the Paliki-Kupaliki; the Father of the heavenly brothers — the Shining Sky; Goryn, Dubyn, Usyn, Medusa the Gorgon and the Serpent Gorynych; and also where the serpent tempted Adam and Eve.

### *THE OX AND THE SUN*

In Slavic folk tradition, the bull is a particularly revered animal. It is known from the records of ethnographic expeditions that in some parts of Russia, as late as the early 20th century, bulls were still being sacrificed. This tradition is very ancient and dates back to time immemorial. Thus, in the 6th century, Procopius of Caesarea wrote that the Slavs sacrificed bulls to the god — 'the creator of lightning'.

In the vicinity of Simferopol, archaeologists have repeatedly uncovered burials of sacred bulls dating back to the 1st millennium BC. In Kerch in 1959, a bronze hatchet bearing the image of a bull was found in a single burial site.

According to archaeologists, bull skulls, apart from those found in Crimea, have been found in Bronze Age graves stretching from the Dnieper to the Volga; across the entire territory occupied by the tribes of the Yamnaya, Catacomb and Srubna cultures. A stone sculpture of the head of a sacred bull was found near Odessa. According to the archaeologist A. Shepinsky, bull bones have been found on numerous occasions in ring-shaped pits — burial sites in the steppes of Crimea and the Kherson region.

Sacred bulls of the sun, depicted with a bull's head and the sun between its horns, are also known in the Trypillian culture. As Academician B. A. Rybakov noted in his time, this symbol leads us to

the cult of the sun god Mithras, associated with the bull. It is also worth noting that in Ancient Egypt there existed the cult of the sacred bull Apis. When such a bull died, it was buried in a sarcophagus in a special tomb with a splendour befitting a pharaoh.

The theme of the deification of the bull has survived the centuries and unexpectedly manifested itself in Christianity as well. From the 16th century onwards, miniatures depicting the evangelist Luke with a bull's head began to appear in Russia.

### ***COW-COW-SHIT***

Generally speaking, cows were treated with great respect in Russia and were referred to as 'nurses'. This is also reflected in the word '**cow**' itself, which shares a common root with words such as '**roof**', '**shelter**' and '**blood**'.

In Russia, a cow has long been called a 'govyada'. The words '**govyadina**' (beef) and '**govyazhiy**' (of a cow) are derived from this word. It is quite interesting that, according to Dal, the Russians have preserved **the** half-forgotten word '**gobina**' —

'**govina**' meaning harvest, abundance, wealth. To this day, the Russian language retains the word 'govet' — to live; another meaning of this word, according to V.I. Dal, is to respect someone to the highest degree, to revere someone. The third meaning is 'to fast, to abstain from food'. Perhaps in Rus', those who did not eat beef **were said to be 'govey'**.

Another interesting point is that one of the names of the Supreme God of the Hindus, the boy-shepherd, is Govinda. These parallels point to the common origin of the Indo-European peoples and their shared cult of the bull.

However, attitudes towards cows have changed somewhat over time. There is reason to suppose that the word 'govo' is related to the word 'go-vado'. Thus, according to V.I. Dal's definition, 'govenka' was the popular name for a two-wheeled cart used to carry manure to the fields.

### ***THE BULL CULT***

The bull's head with horns also became a symbol of evil forces. This image is well known among the people as the devil. The devil has the appearance of a man covered in hair; however, his head is that of a bull or a cow. Instead of feet, the devil has hooves; he also has a cow's tail. Most likely, the image of the devil took shape long before the adoption of Christianity, and it is linked to the cult of the bull. The priest would don a bull's mask, tie a cow's tail to the back, and attach hooves to his feet. Thus attired, the priest would perform ritual songs and enact ritual actions to ensure the happiness and prosperity of the clan.

It is quite interesting that Erlik, the Tibetan lord of the dead, has a human body and the head of a bull with horns. A third eye shines on his forehead. He rides a black bull, and in his hands he holds a snake instead of a whip.

The image of Erlik extends far beyond what one might expect. In Altai myths, Erlik is endowed with the functions of a demiurge. He assists God and his brother Ulgen in creating the world. It is he who endows humans with a soul, thereby securing for himself the right to take a person's soul after death. According to Tuvan belief, Erlik creates animals and endows them with souls. In some myths, Erlik creates 'dark' humanity as a counterpoint to the 'white' humanity created by his brother.

Thus, Erlik is one of two demiurges responsible for the spread of evil across the Earth. It is worth noting that this interpretation links these Eastern beliefs to the myths of divine twins who create the world and humankind, which are known in the Indo-European tradition.

Ultimately, for his transgressions, Erlik is cast into the underworld by his brother and becomes the ruler of the realm of the dead. He compels people to make sacrifices and drinks human blood himself. He compels the souls of the dead to journey to Earth at night and wreak all manner of evil there.

It is believed that the name Erlik derives from the Old Uyghur Erlik Kagan (mighty ruler). This name is identical to Yama, the lord of the Buddhist underworld. According to legend, Erlik was beheaded, but being immortal, he attached to himself the severed head of a bull, which

immediately fused with his human body. Undoubtedly, the figure of Erlik is that of the devil incarnate.

### ***SHIVA AND SIVKA-BURKA***

The demon Keteb Meriri in Judaism bears a resemblance to Erlik. He has the head of a calf and spiralling horns on a human body. However, his third eye is situated not between his eyebrows, but on his chest. It would appear that these characters were granted the title of 'King of the Dead' not so very long ago. This links them to Veles-Volos of the Rus', who is also the King of the Dead.

Shiva's black bull, Nandin, upon which Shiva sits, also has a rather fierce appearance. However, it is not he who has the third eye, but his 'patron'—Shiva. Devotees of Shiva do not cut their hair, which links them to shamans and the ancient Rus' priests of Veles.

V. Demin believed that the name Shiva is similar to that of the Slavic goddess Siva. This allows him to draw parallels with the Russian fairy tale 'Sivka-Burka, the Prophetic Cow'. Perhaps in ancient times 'Sivka-Burka' was not only a horse, but also a bull-helper. Hence the name 'burenka' (brown cow).

In order to shield the nurturing cow from harm and 'strip' her of the label of an evil spirit, the Russian people resorted to a ruse. They altered the original image of the devil Veles, giving his face a resemblance to a pig. The result was a sort of hybrid — a pig's snout with horns, hooves on its feet, and a long cow's tail at the back.

### ***'THE BULL BUTTS THE COW...'***

With the arrival of Christianity, the custom of slaughtering a bull came to be associated with the feast day of Elijah the Prophet, who had replaced the God of Thunder. Thus, when men gathered for a brotherhood feast on Elijah's Day, it was traditional to slaughter the 'promised' (communal) bull. During the ritual meal, hunters in the Olonets Governorate would try to

grab a piece of meat with a bone — it was believed that with it they ‘seize happiness’. The slaughter of the bull took place by the church, and the local priest also took part in the communal meal. Folk tales about bulls go like this:

The bull roams the  
mountains, The  
heifer roams the  
valleys, The bull will  
hang,  
the Turitsa flashes.

This refers to a thunderstorm. However, the theme of fertility is also present. The bull or ‘tur’ mask was widely used in folk masquerade games with erotic undertones. For instance, there is a well-known folk game called ‘Beef’, which was widespread in the Kostroma Governorate. The participants would carry a naked, bound comrade into the hut. He was tied to a pole, like a carcass of beef. This is how ethnographers describe the game: ‘Young women are called to the “carcass”, and if any of them hides, she is dragged out by force and offered “pieces of beef”, mostly from the private parts’.

Almost everywhere in Russia, the game ‘The Bull’ was played during the Christmas season. A young man carrying a pot on a pot-holder would run round the girls, mooing. He would be ‘sold off’, and the pot would be smashed. The ‘bull’ would run away, whilst the girls were questioned: ‘Who did the bull eat with?’ At the same time, the bull’s sexual attributes were played upon in every way: ‘The bull pokes the cow. The cow: Moo! Thank you, bull!’

During matchmaking, the matchmaker would strike up a metaphorical conversation: ‘Do you happen to have a heifer for sale? We have a young bull.’

### **BUY TUR**

As V.I. Dal writes, the combination of the words ‘buiy tur’ (see Prince Vsevolod) seems to bring together the names of two types of bull: the buiy (buffalo) and the tur. ‘Buiy tur’ is an epithet characterising the person so described as a brave, reckless, daring warrior. Dal cites the following words and expressions: *a ‘buiy voivode’, a ‘buiy fellow’; ‘a word of honour’ and*

*a wild head will be subdued; nowhere to lay one's wild little head; oh, you fine lad, all bravado, little valour; put the drunken rowdy — the sober one — on a chain.*

A 'buian' has always been, and still is, the term for a restless, boisterous, impetuous person, a lout, a bully and a brawler.

In the old days, 'buyan' or 'buyvishche' also referred to an elevated spot exposed to the winds; later, it came to mean a churchyard with a church on high ground. Sometimes 'buyvishche' referred to a cattle pasture, an open space beyond the village boundaries that was not ploughed.

It is possible that in ancient times, on the high ground known as a 'buivishche', the Slavs would sacrifice bulls.

In the Moscow and Bogorodsk provinces, 'gonka na bui' referred to a place where young women and men would gather, where they would meet and court one another. From there, they would disperse in pairs across the outskirts. The Old Russian word 'buyavyn' — juicy, moist, full of sap (referring to grass) — points to a semantic connection with fertility rites.

In fairy tales and epics, one may come across the name of Buyan Island. Thus, in A.S. Pushkin: 'Past Buyan Island, into the realm of the glorious Sultan...'

## **TOUR**

On Trinity Sunday, people used to sing:  
Oh, aurochs, brave and  
dashing! He came from a  
great city, He called out to a  
fair maiden  
To wrestle with him on the grass,  
Oh, Did-Lado! to wrestle...

'The fierce aurochs Vsevolod' is mentioned more than once in Old Russian chronicles; one can also read in them: 'Brave as an aurochs'. According to the definition in V.I. Dal's dictionary: 'A tur is a wild bull, now known as a bison, which survives today only in the Belovezhskaya Pushcha and beyond the Caucasus, though it was once found everywhere'.

In Chuvash mythology, the pantheon is headed by the heavenly creator god Sulti-tura. As is well known, Chuvash mythology, thanks to their late Christianisation, has largely retained its pagan character. The very name of the supreme Chuvash god Sulti-tura goes back to the Indo-European image of the heavenly bull.

The Chuvash also have other creator gods: Chun Suratakan Tura — the creator of human souls. In this name, we see an etymological and phonetic resemblance to the Hindu sun god, Surya. Chun Suratakan Tura can be interpreted as the solar bull.

The Chuvash creator of children is Yval-her Suratakan Tura. In this name, we recognise the names Vala (Fala) and Her, which are understandable to us without translation. These gods are directly associated with the conception of children.

The Chuvash also have a deity called 'Kharpan Tura' – from the Arabic 'kurban' — sacrifice; literally, a sacrificial bull.

The Chuvash deity of the wind is Sil, and the deity of lightning is Sisem. These names require no translation into modern Russian.

## ***TURA***

Chuvash mythology reveals links to ancient Iranian mythology. Thus, Tura (Avestan) and Tur (Persian) are the progenitor of the Turanians. The term 'Turanians' is generally understood to refer to Eastern Iranian nomads and the Turks.

Tur is one of three brothers. According to the Avesta, these brothers are descendants of the legendary forefather of the Aryans, Yima. The eastern lands—Turan and Chin—pass into Tur's possession from his father. Salman's domain is the western land of Rum. The treacherous Salman and Tur kill their younger brother Eraj, to whom Iran and Arabistan had been bequeathed. This murder became the cause of a centuries-long feud that flared up between Iran and Turan; between nomads and farmers.

The legend of the three brothers, representing different social classes—a warrior, a herdsman and a farmer—has also been preserved in Russian folklore.

The word ‘tur’—meaning ‘bull’—still features in the names of countries such as Turkey, Turkestan and Turkmenistan. Although aurochs have long since disappeared from the Central Russian Plain, words with the root ‘tur’ have survived in the Russian language. For example, V.I. Dal cites some characteristic expressions: ‘Chase him out of the yard!’, ‘Chase everyone out of here!’, ‘you can’t force a cow through the gate’, ‘tur-turit — to drive, to hurry’.

### ***CATTLE BREEDERS VERSUS FARMERS — THE OX AND THE BEAR***

Clearly, the plots of folk epics about the struggle between the bull and the bear have very ancient origins. Paradoxically, it is precisely this plot that has become the emblem of the commodities and raw materials exchange. Bulls fight against bears. Sometimes one side prevails, sometimes the other.

The bull was particularly revered by the pastoral tribes that once roamed the steppes of Central Asia. Nomads, constantly migrating in search of better pastures for their numerous herds, were at odds with the settled farmers living in the forested regions of Eurasia. The forest tribes had their own totem — the bear.

It appears that both the nomads and the farmers were descendants of what was once a single people—Iranian-speaking horsemen who called themselves Aryans. At the beginning of the 1st millennium BC, the Aryans came from the Eastern European steppes to Iran and named their country Ariana (from which the name Iran derives). The Aryans then set off for India and gradually conquered it. Another group of Aryan tribes conquered the territory of modern-day Europe. However, there was no unity amongst the Aryans. The settled inhabitants of Iran and Europe were at odds with the nomads. The Greeks called the nomads Scythians, the Persians called them Saka, and the settled inhabitants of Eastern Iran called them Turans. The ancient epic of the endless wars between Iran and Turan has come down to us in the account of the 10th-century Iranian poet Firdausi. We know less about the struggle of the inhabitants of Europe against the nomads.

### ***THE PROPHET ZARATHUSTRA***

According to scholars, the prophet Zarathustra lived in the 7th century BC and was also a Tura (Scythian), but later defected to the side of the settled tribes. Zarathustra condemned wars of aggression and founded a religion that extolled the cult of the farmer. Zaratushttra's idea sounded much like the slogan of a social revolution: The working people, led by a wise leader, will triumph over predatory power!

Zoroaster elevated the image of the peaceful shepherd to unattainable heights. He denounced members of the military class who plundered and killed peaceful peasants and stole their livestock. Zoroaster believed that only a people's leader could provide real protection for the peaceful population. He would pave the way for the true faith! 'The followers of the Daevas have become the worst enemies of peaceful herdsmen. They speak disparagingly of livestock and the Sun, lay waste to pastures, and take up arms against the people of Arta. They cannot find a way of life without inflicting violence upon the peaceful herdsman, even though he does no harm whatsoever to either livestock or people. They bring poverty and ruin to the home, the village, the region, the country. They must be fought with the force of arms. The soul of the cattle laments that it has no strong defender,' it is written in the Arta, the precepts handed down by Zarathustra.

Zoroaster reformed the religion of the Aryans and abolished the sacrifice of livestock, which was widely practised in that era. Later, Christianity adopted the ban on sacrifices.

Essentially, the conflict that arose in the 1st millennium within Aryan society, and at the centre of which Zoroaster found himself, had social and class-based causes rather than ethnic ones.

The nomadic warriors fell out with the settled farmers, whom we would now call peasants. Strangely enough, echoes of this ancient conflict can also be traced in Slavic myths.

### ***THE THREE HEROES***

We are all familiar with the three bogatyrs of the Russian land: Ilya Muromets, Dobrynya Nikitich and Alyosha Popovich. However, relations between the bogatyrs were by no means always ideal. In the epic 'Ilya

Muromets and the Nightingale the Robber' describes how Ilya defeated the Nightingale the Robber and brought him to the capital city of Kiev to Prince Vladimir.

‘Thank you, Ilya Muromets,’ said Prince Vladimir. ‘Stay in my retinue; you shall be the senior hero, the leader of the other heroes...

The courteous Dobrynyushka approached Ilya:

— ‘Glorious warrior Ilya Ivanovich, you shall be the senior member of our retinue. Please take me and Alyosha Popovich as your comrades.’

At this, Alyosha flew into a rage and leapt to his feet:

— Are you in your right mind, Dobrynyushka? You yourself are of boyar stock, I am of priestly stock, and no one knows or understands where he came from—he was brought here from who knows where...

Then Alyosha cried out:

— ‘What on earth is going on? Who have the Russian heroes chosen as their leader? A filthy, unwashed country bumpkin from the woods!’

Alyosha barked at him like a puppy at a bull: ‘How much glory will he ever win, sipping mead at merry feasts!’

Ilya could not bear it, and leapt to his feet:

— The priest’s son speaks the truth — it is not fitting for a warrior to sit at a feast, growing fat. Let me go, Prince, to look out across the wide steppes, to see if the enemy is prowling across our native Rus’, or if bandits have taken up position somewhere.

And Ilya went out of the gridna (the quarters for the warriors of the druzhina) and off he went.”

### ***WHEN GOOD AND EVIL FIRST APPEARED***

According to legend, the 77-year-old Zarathustra himself perished in battle against the nomadic Tura. However, his ideas formed the basis for the religion known as Zoroastrianism, as well as for the subsequent Mithraism (named after the sun god and the Treaty of Mithra) and Christianity.

At least, that is the view of Dr E.O. Berzin, Doctor of Historical Sciences. Here is what he writes in his article ‘What Did Zarathustra Teach?’, published before perestroika in the journal *\*Atheistic Readings\**:

‘Essentially, the idea of the devil—the father of all evil—first appears with Zarathustra. It is then that the motif of the choice between good and evil, developed by later religions—Christianity and Islam—first emerges. The Jews served as the intermediary between Zoroastrianism and other later religions. They became acquainted with Zoroastrianism during the ‘Babylonian Captivity’—in the 6th century BC. At that time, Judea was part of the Achaemenid Empire. It is noteworthy that the concepts of paradise, hell, the Last Judgement, resurrection from the dead, angels and demons first appear in the Old Testament only in the Book of Daniel, who, according to tradition, was a minister to the Persian king Darius I.

It would appear that the Jews borrowed these ideas from Zoroastrianism. Furthermore, the concept of a holy war against infidels found its way into Islam after Iran was conquered by the Arabs in the 7th century CE.

In the early centuries of our era, Zoroastrianism also influenced Buddhism, in which the idea of the coming saviour of the world—Maitreya Buddha—appears.

#### ***WHAT IS THE CALL OF THE DIV?***

The religion of the Aryans was dualistic in its essence. The Aryans did not seek to portray either the old or the new gods in a negative light... Light and darkness alternated and formed the basis of the cosmic world order, called ‘rima’ by the ancient Hindus. It is likely that the Russian word ‘rhythm’ is etymologically linked to this concept.

E.O. Berzin wrote in his article ‘What Did Zarathustra Teach?’:

*‘If one follows the ideas of Zarathustra, then on the side of evil stands a whole legion of daevas (or devas). Judging by the names of some of them, these are the ancient Aryan gods Indra and Nanhatya, demoted by Zarathustra to the rank of demons.’*

We might add that the Devas or Divs were by no means always demons. These names also appear in literary monuments of Russian culture. Thus, in ‘The Tale of Igor’s Campaign’: ‘The Div calls out from the top of the tree...’, and then descends: ‘The Div has already struck the ground’. Old Russian texts contain references to the cult of Div, who is depicted as the father of the gods and men, and the creator of lightning.

According to Indo-European mythology, the chief god was called ‘Divo’ — he personified the ‘shining daytime sky’. In the ancient Indian language, Deva means god, Dyaus means sky, and Dyaus Pater means Father. It is not difficult to notice the similarity in the pronunciation and spelling of these names to the name Devil.

The Lithuanian name of the ancient supreme deity is Dievas. This means God. ‘Dievas Pater’ means ‘God the Father’. The Prussian name of the deity — is ‘Dive’; the Latin equivalent is ‘Jupiter’... The Latvian name for the supreme deity — Debess Tevs — ‘Father of the Sky’. It is related in pronunciation and meaning to the Greek name of the supreme God — ‘Zeus’.

### **MOTHER-RAW-EARTH**

The God the Father in Heaven corresponds to the fertilised Earth. In the Avestan tradition, this is Ardisura Anahita; in the Slavic tradition, Mother-Syra-Earth. It is noteworthy that the Avestan ‘Sura’ corresponds to the Slavic ‘syra’. The Earth’s fruit-bearing function is reflected in a common Indo-European motif: man originated—was born—from Mother Earth.

One might also compare the name of the human being itself: **the Latin ‘homo’, the Gothic ‘huma’, and the Lithuanian ‘humos’**. **The Russian word ‘gumno’** refers to a place where grain is threshed. Clearly, this word has shifted from its original meaning, yet it has retained a connection with the earth’s fertile nature.

The presence of a pair such as ‘Heaven – Earth’ in ancient Indian mythology — ‘Dyava-Prthivi’ — points to a single source

of the emergence of such motifs.

The myths of the life-giving rain, of the birth of all things from the womb of Mother Earth, and of death are also linked to this. Thus, the Russian word

**‘death’** corresponds to the ancient Indian word **‘mr-ta’**. A person who drinks the elixir of immortality — **‘amrita’** — is likened to the heavenly gods who have attained immortality. The prefix **‘a’** — **‘amrita’** — indicates the negation (of death).

### ***THE SONS OF HEAVEN AND IVAN-DA-MARYA***

According to Indo-European beliefs, twin children are born of the deity of Heaven and the deity of Mother Earth. In Greek tradition, these are the **‘Dioscuri’** — twin children; in ancient Indian tradition — **‘Divo Parata’** — the sons of the Sky God; in the Lithuanian tradition — **‘Divo Sunelia’**

— the sons of God, and in the Latvian tradition — **‘Divo Deli’** — the children of God.

In the Lithuanian tradition, twins are born to Debess Tevs and Mother Earth; in a later version of the myth, they are of opposite sexes. The son and daughter enter into an incestuous marriage. This motif is associated with the **‘heavenly wedding’**.

The symbol of the divine twins is horses. Paired depictions of horses on roof ridges are found in Germanic, Baltic and Slavic traditions. The antiquity of the twin myth is confirmed by archaeological finds — the use of horses in the harness of war chariots in the 3rd–2nd millennia BC.

Twins of opposite sexes enter into incestuous relationships. Information on this can also be gleaned from the Vedic myth of Yama and his sister Yami. Yama was the first mortal human, and later became the deity of death, dwelling in the underworld. The name Yama is virtually identical to the Avestan progenitor of mankind, Yima, and the Kafir Imre. It is likely that the origin of the name of the first man, Imir, and the Old Irish name Main, meaning

**‘twin’**. Iranian tradition tells of the marriage of Yima and his sister Yimak. This tradition served as a precedent for the arrangement of actual marriages among the Zoroastrians. It is quite interesting that the names of the celestial twins are homophonous with the Russian word **‘death’**. Among the Slavs

also have a similar myth about the incest between Ivan and Marya. Folk tradition has linked this myth to the festival of Ivan Kupala.

### ***PALIKI-KUPALIKI***

Among the Italics, as among other Europeans, twin myths were widespread in ancient times. Thus, Aeschylus, who lived in the 4th–5th centuries BCE, mentions the ancient cult of the Paliki twins. In a local folk myth adapted by Aeschylus, a nymph with the telling name of Phalia became pregnant by Zeus in the form of a bull. (The nymph's name is striking for its similarity to the word 'phallus'.) Fearing the wrath of the heavenly gods for her unlawful act, the nymph hid deep underground. During childbirth, the earth split open and brought two twins into the world.

The cult of the Paliki was associated with purifying fire. This presumably explains the similarity between the twins' names and the Russian word 'palit' — to burn. During the festival, the shepherds worshipped their goddess Palia. They implored her for protection and patronage. In the evening, festivities were held, ritual bonfires were lit, and livestock were driven through them; then young girls and lads leapt over the bonfires themselves. After this, both livestock and people plunged into the river's waters... This ritual resembles the Slavic festival of Ivan Kupala. The researcher Yuri Petukhov asserts that the name Kupala is cognate with that of the Greek god of light, Apollo. Among the Italics, the cult of Kupavon persisted, which in a sense serves as an intermediate link between Apollo and Kupala. It was precisely on the night of Ivan Kupala that the ancient legend of the incest between Ivan and Marya seemed to come to life. In Russian villages, this festival is still called 'kupaliki', which is similar to the Italian name for the festival 'paliki'. It is possible that the common modern expression 'how low you have fallen!' reproduces an ancient semantic sequence associated with the festival of purifying fire and water. No wonder they say one must pass through 'fire, water and copper pipes'.

## **HOW TO DEFEAT AN IMMORTAL DRAGON**

In Indo-European tradition, the marriage of the Shining Sky and Mother Earth gives birth to twins. The image of the fiery serpent is perceived in folk tradition as a phallus connecting Heaven and Earth. In East Slavic tradition, there is Zmiulan — a character associated with Beles. This is a kind of manifestation of the Fiery Serpent — the dragon. According to folk beliefs, King Fire and Queen Malanitsa (Lightning) burn the herds of King Zmiulan. He, in turn, hides from them in the hollow of an old oak tree (an analogue of the World Tree). In other versions of the myth — in the underworld.

In the opinion of researchers V.N. Toporov and V.V. Ivanov, the relationship of the thunderer and his serpent-like adversary form a central myth of the Slavs. The dragon is associated with the theme of fertility and the element of water. He is the lord of the waters. To release the waters and nourish the earth with fertile rain, the dragon must be slain. Then the long-awaited rain will fall. However, the dragon possesses all the traits of a god who dies and is reborn. And that is precisely why he is immortal. A similar myth exists among many Indo-European peoples. For example, the Greek Zeus battles the serpent-like Typhon, and the Hittite God of Thunder defeats the serpent that has abducted the king's bride. The Thunderer destroys the serpent's stone refuge—the mountain—by striking lightning with two stones. Or, in another version, by striking the stone sky with his stone mace. This is probably the origin of the ritual, very common among the Indo-Europeans, of kindling sacred fire by striking two stones together.

## **GORYNIA, DUBYNIA, USYNIA**

The dragon jealously guards riches and treasures, which can only be obtained by defeating him.

‘In the Russian epic about the serpent, it is said thus: As in those days, in that time  
There's no wind—a cloud has rolled in.

No clouds — just the rain falling. No rain —  
sparks are flying:  
Gorynychishche the Serpent flies,  
On twelve serpent heads...'

This serpent dwells in the belly of the mountain, which is why he is called Gorynych. It is possible that the word 'Gorynych' is etymologically linked to the words

'horn' and 'bellows'. Gorynych blows and puffs like a horn, sending sparks flying. The Greek Gorgon is also consonant with the name of the serpent from Russian folklore. Gorgon's head was traditionally depicted surrounded by snake-like hair. A similar depiction of Gorgon, in the form of a bronze protective armour, was also found in one of the Scythian burial mounds. This points to very close ties between the Scythians, Greeks and Rus'.

In Russian fairy tales, there are three giants: Gorynya, Dubynia and Usynia. Gorynya stirs up mountains and causes landslides: 'he rocks a mountain on his little finger, he topples mountains'. Dubynia 'levels' oak trees. If an oak is small, he pulls it out of the ground; if an oak is large, he drives it into the ground. Usynia controls the element of water, causing floods and high water. This is evidenced by his name, which sounds rather indecent to modern ears, being derived from the verb 'to piss'. However, some researchers believe the name Usynia has a perfectly respectable origin, derived from the noun 'moustache' (usy). Others believe that the name Usynia is derived from the verb 'to dry up' (usykhat).

These chthonic giants personify the forces of nature. The heroes of epics and fairy tales battle the giants and emerge victorious, subduing the fury of the elements.

### ***THE SERPENT SEDUCED ADAM AND EVE UNDER THE TREE OF THE WORLD***

It is clear that Veles is, in some respects, identical to Zmey Gorynych, Goryna and Medusa the Gorgon. Dobrynya Nikitovich, having defeated Zmey Gorynych, declares:

‘Part, O Mother Earth,  
Part into four, and split into quarters! Go on,  
devour this blood—all the serpent’s blood!  
Then Mother Earth parted, And she devoured  
all the serpent’s blood.”

This resembles the ‘release’ of the waters following the death of Beles. And here is how Dobrynya’s journey to the serpent’s lair is described in the epic:

‘Then Dobrynya entered the lair,  
Deep into its depths.  
There sit forty kings, forty princes, And there  
is no strength or reckoning for the common  
man...”

All this is reminiscent of the Sun God’s journey to the afterlife, where he is met by the souls of the dead. Dobrynya’s rescue of the prince’s niece, the young Zabava, daughter of Putyatichna, resembles Orpheus’s attempt to rescue his Eurydice from the underworld. It is also reminiscent of Christ’s descent into hell.

In Egypt, the earth god Geb was sometimes depicted with a serpent’s head, indicating a certain kinship with the dragon. The ancient image of the serpent at the roots of the World Tree, connecting Earth and Heaven, takes on a negative connotation in the ‘new’ religions: Zoroastrianism, Mithraism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The motif of the Fall is associated with it. It is possible that the serpent did not tempt Adam and Eve just anywhere amongst the bushes of the Garden of Eden, but beneath the World Tree. It is no coincidence that the Fields of Elisha are homophonous with the word Veles.

The biblical motif of the creation of man by God the Father from the dust of the earth resembles the pagan motif of the sacred marriage of the Shining Sky and Mother Earth. According to the Bible, Eve was created from Adam’s rib, which recalls the pagan motif of the birth of opposite-sex twins who engaged in forbidden sexual relations. For this they paid the price, becoming mortal.

## Chapter 3. AN UNEXPECTED CHANGE OF SUBJECT

This chapter discusses twins as the offspring of beasts, the thirty-three heroes, the pharaohs who improved the breed, the superhuman who was never born, the children of the leaders of the Third Reich, methods of selection, how Nature selects, what the essence of Darwin's theory of selection is, what lies behind the term 'Nature', as well as where Darwin was wrong, what Hegel has in common with a worm, intelligent arthropods as the ancestors of arthropods, and where pigs came from. To conclude this chapter, you can read about how to resist the temptation to climb a tree.

### *ARE TWINS THE DESCENDANTS OF BEASTS?*

Thus, twin myths are characteristic of all Indo-Europeans, and not only them — such myths are also found among Australians, Africans, Polynesians and the Native Americans. According to experts, these parallel mythological motifs, associated with the sacralisation of twins, are very ancient and date back to prehistory.

Moreover, primatologists note with surprise that even among higher anthropoids, unusual behaviour is observed towards newborn twins and their mother. For a time, a mother who has given birth to twins is banished from the troop and keeps her distance from it. Only after this peculiar 'quarantine' is she allowed back into the family. Similar rituals are found amongst peoples living in harmony with nature — amidst the natural world. For instance, among the Nihvs, who live on Sakhalin and in the Amur region, in times long past the mother of twins was buried in a bear's den. It was believed that she had committed a sin with a bear. And the twins themselves were spoken of as the bear's offspring. The ritual of killing twins was widespread among a wide variety of peoples. Among the Hittites, twins were taken into the forest or thrown into the water in pots. In the forest

the twins became prey to wild beasts. However, sometimes the beasts would nurse and raise the twins among themselves. Thus, prehistoric Mowglis came into the world. Legends of such man-beasts exist among many peoples of the world.

### ***THIRTY-THREE HEROES IN SCALES, HOT AS FIRE...***

In an ancient Hittite tale about the children of Queen Kanisha, the queen gives birth to thirty twin sons and, frightened by this, places them in pots and casts them into the 'Sea of Tsalna' (the Black Sea). The Sea God raises the twins. When they come of age, they set off in search of their mother. This legend bears a striking resemblance to an episode from A.S. Pushkin's 'The Tale of Tsar Saltan...'.

The sea will swell and rage,  
Boil and howl, Pour onto the  
empty shore,  
Spilling out in a noisy rush,  
And there they find  
themselves on the shore,  
In scales like burning  
heat, Thirty-three heroes,  
All dashing and  
handsome, Young giants,  
All alike, as if hand-picked,  
Take them, Uncle Black  
Sea...

According to the Hittite tale, the thirty twins, having come ashore, find their thirty sisters and enter into an incestuous relationship with them. The Sea God (Chernomor) placed a different 'non-human core' within the souls of the male twins, and the twins do not recognise their sisters.

As already mentioned, among many peoples, twins are regarded as two demiurgic progenitors. Thus, among the Iroquois and other North American Indians, one twin god creates the sun and

humans, whilst the other creates the Moon and the beasts. One ascends to Heaven, whilst the other descends into the underworld.

### ***HOW THE PHARAOHS IMPROVED THEIR LINEAGE***

Paradoxical as it may seem, twin myths became the subject of scientific study from an unexpected practical perspective in the early and mid-20th century.

It is well known that the Egyptian pharaohs engaged in incestuous relationships with their sisters. This was done for a reason. The pharaohs believed that in this way the divine element was preserved and passed on to descendants within the royal line. As geneticists explain, close kinship over several generations leads to genes becoming homozygous. This can result in degeneration, yet it also increases the chance of a 'prodigy' being born.

An example of genetic degeneration is the well-known figure of Tutankhamun, who died at the age of 18 from the hereditary condition coeliac disease (a disorder affecting the absorption of gluten in the intestines).

An example of a 'prodigy' is Cleopatra VII, who was renowned for her intelligence and beauty. She was born to Ptolemy X and his own sister.

Nazi leaders, who seriously believed in the reality of twin myths and in the possibility of creating a superhuman through inbreeding, undertook a detailed study of the issue not only from a historical perspective, but also, so to speak, from a practical one.

In the Third Reich, experiments were conducted involving the interbreeding of brothers and sisters. According to some sources, the 'material' for such experiments was often supplied from Eastern Europe.

### ***THE SUPERMAN NEVER CAME TO BE***

It is well known that, even in Darwin's time, breeders sought to practise inbreeding amongst animals. This allowed the genes of domestic animals to be brought into a homozygous state, thereby enabling the selection of so-called 'pure lines'. Afterwards, breeders resorted to distant hybridisation, which led to 'breed improvement'. It is well known that outcrossing followed by selection improves the characteristics of hybrids. In the first generation of hybrids, increased vigour and particularly robust development are observed. This phenomenon is known as heterosis or hybrid vigour. In subsequent crossings of the hybrids amongst themselves, hybrid vigour diminishes because homozygous genes are selected out.

As is well known, Himmler was a breeder. He practised breeding first on poultry, then began to practise on humans.

As early as 1935, Himmler signed an order to establish a network of maternity hospitals across Germany, in which 'racially flawless children' were to be born. Subsequently, these maternity hospitals were regarded as strategic targets, and to prevent them from being bombed by Allied aircraft, they were disguised as ordinary maternity hospitals. Inbreeding was practised among the so-called Aryan (German) nation and non-Aryan nations, to which the Reich leadership also counted the Slavs. The children born were thoroughly examined. Those deemed unfit, those who did not meet the criteria, were ruthlessly 'weeded out' — destroyed. Those of pure bloodlines were raised in special institutions or placed in the care of elite (model) German families. It was then intended that, once they had grown up, they would be 'cross-bred' with other pure-blooded homozygotes. Outbreeding — hybridisation — was supposed to lead to the birth of a 'superhuman'. The Nazis did not have enough time to carry out their inhuman experiment. The 'superhumans' possessing 'hybrid strength' never came into being.

### ***THE LEADER'S CHILDREN***

Nevertheless, about seven years ago, new details unexpectedly came to light regarding how the Nazis had organised their project to create the 'New Man'. The project was well organised, with German meticulousness. All marriages were meticulously recorded. 'True Aryans' were selected from among the officers and soldiers of the Wehrmacht. They were required to visit a secret facility where they were to impregnate sexual partners specially selected for them — German, Scandinavian and women of Slavic appearance. In agricultural practice, this is known as individual selection. The children born were to be subjected to examination. Their lives were spared only after their 'racial identity' had been verified.

The Führer and the leaders of the Third Reich did not shy away from this 'sacred' mission. Special hopes were pinned on the Führer's descendants. According to the memoirs of former SS Obersturmführer (Senior Lieutenant) Erich Runge, who lived in Brazil (interviews with him were published in the foreign press and reprinted by the domestic press), a secret 'Thor' project was carried out (for reference, Thor is the god of thunder, storms and fertility in Norse-Germanic mythology. In Slavic mythology, according to experts, he corresponds to Perun).

As a result of this project, sperm was extracted from the testicles of Hitler and other Nazi bigwigs by making a small incision. This sperm was then used to inseminate selected German and Scandinavian women. In this way, the Führer fathered around 20 children through surrogacy, who were raised in a secret complex in the Bavarian Alps. Officially, this base was called 'Lebensborn Branch No. 91146'. After the war, the documents were destroyed, and the children were distributed among compassionate farmers. According to another version, the Führer's children were taken away and placed in specially selected families for upbringing.

#### ***SCANDAL SURROUNDING THE ELDERLY CHILDREN***

Among other things, the Nazis deported around 20,000 young children and a similar number of teenagers from the Czech Republic, Yugoslavia, Poland and Russia. They were placed with German families to be brought up. The long-term plan was to produce offspring from them for the subsequent selection

‘New Man’. However, this did not succeed. And thank God for that!

Nevertheless, as part of a secret programme, around 12,000 children were born who were never told the names of their parents. From a very young age, they were placed with German families to undergo so-called ‘Aryanisation’.

After the Victory, these children were placed in children’s homes. However, records were kept of who had fathered the child and when they were born. A few years ago, these documents fell into the hands of the British press. Lists were published. And it turned out that the children, who are now in their seventies or older, have had quite successful careers. The British press reported that at least 200 of these children had become members of parliaments in European countries. Among them are several presidents and prime ministers. A massive scandal erupted, with journalists being accused of revealing details of people’s private lives without having the moral right to do so. Furthermore, some accused the press of whipping up hysteria around eugenics and the racial issue. The very fact that many victims of the inhuman Nazi experiment went on to become outstanding figures proved inconvenient for everyone, and it was quickly forgotten. Nevertheless, neither Hitler, nor Himmler, nor their henchmen discovered anything new. The laws of selection apply not only in the animal world, but also to humans. Charles Darwin wrote about this long ago. And this fact in no way diminishes the gravity of the crimes committed by the Nazi monsters.

### ***HOW NATURE SELECTS...***

Since we have started talking about selection, we cannot fail to mention Darwin’s name in this context. Some refer to the theory of natural selection as the theory of selection. And there is compelling evidence for this. As is well known, Darwin was greatly impressed by the successes

of English breeders. Having familiarised himself more closely with breeding methods, Darwin discovered that English breeders used a method they called '**selection**'. Breeders select animals or plants with the desired characteristics for subsequent cross-breeding. Animals and plants with unwanted traits were destroyed. In this way, new breeds and varieties were created.

Darwin hypothesised that something similar occurs in nature. Nature selects those animals or plants that are better adapted to their environment. The less well-adapted perish (are eliminated), as there is objectively not enough living space, food, light or other factors necessary for survival for everyone. Thus, according to Darwin, Nature acts as a breeder, improving the characteristics of individuals. It (Nature) accumulates good qualities and traits in them and eliminates the bad ones. In this way, species change and improve. In his book *'On the Origin of Species'*, Darwin wrote:

*'To speak metaphorically, one might say that natural selection, day by day and hour by hour, throughout the world, sifts out the slightest variations, discarding the bad, preserving and accumulating the good; it works silently and invisibly, wherever and whenever the opportunity arises, to improve every living organism in relation to the conditions of its life, both organic and inorganic'* (p. 92).

Elsewhere, Darwin writes that *'Nature... cares for external characteristics only insofar as they are useful to some creature... Man selects for his own benefit; Nature selects only for the benefit of the organism she protects'* (p. 91).

#### **BETTER AND BETTER... MORE AND MORE USEFUL...**

The fact of equating methods selection carried out by humans, with the processes occurring in Nature (Darwin writes the word 'Nature' with a capital letter), strikes me as incorrect. And why on earth would Nature care about the 'benefit of a protected organism'?

It couldn't care less about the benefit of any individual organism, and it has no intention of protecting it.

A breeder acts in his own interest. He wants a pig carcass with fat that melts in the mouth, or a cow that churns out an insane number of litres of milk, or a laying hen that lays a dozen eggs every day. The breeder will be able to sell all of this; as they say nowadays — he'll be able to make a profit.

What can 'Nature' 'earn' from the 'benefit of the protected organism'? Science does not know. And anyway, who is this 'Nature'—with a capital N? I suspect that behind this term, Darwin conceals a deity that acts for the good of all living things in the world.

In the Middle Ages, Catholic monks held the view that the Creator was a God who did not interfere in the lives of humans and animals. He merely laid down the 'laws' of this world, and man, subject to these laws, improves himself and comes to know Him. Such views are very similar to Darwin's attitude towards Nature. Nature as such does not exist, just as there is no God the Creator in the world. However, there are laws in the world created by Nature. Darwin formulates these laws as follows: heredity, variability, and the selection of the fittest. Under the influence of these 'laws', organisms improve and accumulate 'benefit'. Thus, everything that happens in the world is for the good of organisms, for their own benefit; even the destruction of the least adapted is for the benefit of all. The fittest survive; it is they who accumulate favourable, useful hereditary traits, which they pass on to their offspring. The organisms 'protected' by Nature become better and better. Until, finally, they turn into human beings...

### ***IS 'NATURE' A PERSONIFIED DEITY?***

For those who are unaware, let us say that Darwin believed that humans emerged from the animal kingdom, so to speak, by natural means.

And what, then, remains for 'Nature'—personifying the unnamed Creator who 'devised' such excellent laws? Only one thing: to

a happy smile, hidden behind a cloud, watch as man becomes better and better, and as his descendants improve and improve.

‘Do not take the name of the Lord your God in vain,’ says Scripture. So Darwin does not speak the name of his God. That name is taboo to utter. For Darwin, the term ‘Nature’ is sufficient, behind which a deity is concealed.

It should be noted that Darwin grew up in a religious family. His father was a clergyman. He himself studied, at his father’s insistence, at Cambridge in the theosophical faculty. The wise, unnamed creator who established the ‘laws’ is, in one way or another, present in Darwin’s theory.

Yes, and let’s not forget the word ‘selection’—where it came from. English breeders never for a second doubt who ‘selects’ and for what purpose. Cows and sheep cannot possibly select themselves. It is the breeders who select them. The word ‘selection’ is derived from the verb ‘to select’. This verb implies an active, interested agent — in the form of an ‘English’ breeder in a wide-brimmed hat, a jacket and boots, with a beard and puffing on a traditional pipe. It is unclear what ‘self-interest’ ‘Nature’ has. Does she (Nature) possess an active, agency-bearing principle and her own will to select, that is, to carry out selection? For this, Nature would have to be endowed with such ‘human’ qualities and such a will.

### ***GOD AND THE DEVIL IN ONE BOTTLE***

Incidentally, it was not only Darwin who deified Nature, but the communists as well. It is likely that in the nineteenth century, this attitude towards Nature replaced the attitude towards a god sitting on a cloud with his feet dangling down. Today it has become quite clear that, for Darwin, Marx, Engels and Lenin alike, Nature is an unnamed deity.

What do we actually see? There is the earth (soil), with rivers flowing across it. Trees sprout from the earth. Birds weave their nests in the branches of the trees, and animals run between the trees. Where here is this ‘Nature’ that cares for

‘the benefit of all living creatures’? There is no Nature as such, personified as some kind of force...

There are the interests of living beings. Trees strive to grow, birds and beasts to live as they please, and man is guilty of the same. Only a poet or a theologian—a heretic—could lump all this together and call it Nature...

This is precisely what happened with the ‘theory of natural selection’. Religious figures saw it as a dangerous heresy, and Darwin was accused of extreme materialism. In reality, Darwin’s mindset and education were closer to a religious worldview. Materialists did not wish to criticise Darwin for his theosophical thinking, as they would then have had to admit that their own worldview consisted half of religious dogma.

Darwinism thus combined religious and atheistic worldviews.

### ***WHAT DOES HEGEL HAVE IN COMMON WITH A WORM***

In light of the above, a question may arise: what actually happens in Nature, where did man come from, if he did not ‘evolved naturally from the animal kingdom’?

Myths will help us make sense of this question. As for animals, it is highly unlikely that they descended from the ‘primordial organism’ that Darwin posited. Animals are extremely diverse. For example, to believe that arthropods and vertebrates share a single ancestor would be a clear anachronism in our ‘enlightened age’. Arthropods have a completely different morphology to that of vertebrates. Their nerve cord runs along the abdomen, not along the back as in vertebrates. Arthropods do not have a spine, but an external ‘carapace’ to which the muscles are attached. Arthropods moult periodically — shedding their ‘carapace’. Well, need I say more! Even at the embryonic stage, the anus in arthropods forms where the mouth forms in vertebrates. What resemblance is there here, what common ancestor?

In this light, Engels’ views—which he expressed in his famous maxim from *\*The Dialectics of Nature\**, that arthropods and spiders have much in common with humans and even with worms—seem rather naive... Engels concluded this maxim with the phrase: ‘Hegel, with his qualitative

leap fits in here too'. I really don't know where Hegel 'fits in', but humans have little in common with a worm. A worm is a typical degenerate and parasite, having lost its nervous system, eyes, brain and digestive tract. A worm absorbs nutrients directly through the surface of its body and expels waste products through the same surface. No, Hegel, this clearly does not apply here.

### **THREE PATHS OF EVOLUTION**

The question may arise: if the theory of evolution is incorrect, what, then, can take its place?

I do not know what might take the place of evolutionism, but Darwin's theory is clearly incorrect. In Darwin's view, 'benefit' extends so far that it compels animals to acquire human characteristics. Darwin seriously believed that the benefit to an organism lies in the increasing complexity of its form. Nothing of the sort is true, and the example of the worm, scientifically known as a helminth, is a striking confirmation of this.

Later, A.N. Severtsov and I.I. Shmalgauzen, following in Darwin's footsteps, developed the concepts of idioadaptation, aromorphosis and regression. Idioadaptation, according to the definitions the scientists, is the adaptation organisms to environment. For example, birds, as they learn to fly, transform their forelimbs into wings, grow feathers and other features essential for flight.

Aromorphosis is a qualitative leap in the evolution of living organisms. They acquire organs they did not previously possess. For example, fish came ashore and developed limbs. Brainless chordates acquired a brain, and so on.

Whilst idioadaptation—adaptation to external living conditions—occurs universally in the animal world, the same cannot be said of aromorphosis. This aromorphosis, in my view, is a matter for armchair speculation. No one has ever seen a fish transform into a terrestrial four-legged vertebrate. Yet this is frequently spoken of as a fact. Thus, it is claimed that in the Carboniferous period, a lobe-finned fish crawled onto land and became the ancestor of terrestrial vertebrates. But even I.I. Shmalgauzen himself believed that a lobe-finned

fish, possessing a humerus and forearm, could quite easily have entered the water from land, rather than the other way round. Yet the scientist was categorically forbidden to think this way, and above all to speak or write about it.

### ***WHERE DID THE INTELLIGENT ARTHROPOD LIVE?***

It seems that of the three paths of evolution identified by Severtsov and Schmalhausen, there is only one path — degeneration. Animals and plants, of course, adapt to their environment. They transform their arms into wings, fins, flippers, and so on. But to do this, one must at least have arms...

In my view, there is both degradation and adaptation to the surrounding living conditions. Animals, as it were, 'slip into' an ecological niche within their environment and settle into that environment. In doing so, they 'craft' adaptations directly from their own bodies. Initially, animals appear on our planet more perfect and less adapted to the surrounding conditions. The ancestors

of the 'primitive' animals probably looked almost like humans, but at least this is true of all vertebrates. The original 'proto-organism' for arthropods was probably a 'perfect' and intelligent arthropod, which over time lost its intelligence and turned into spiders, crabs and insects... Such a primordial creature lived in a very distant era, perhaps at the beginning of the Palaeozoic, somewhere around 500 million years ago.

Paradoxical as it may seem, some academics indirectly corroborate the author's speculations by admitting that the ancestral form of crustaceans, arachnids and insects lived on land. It was previously thought that all three of these major groups of arthropods had independent origins. All that remains is to suppose that the original arthropod was intelligent... And why not? If it was intelligent, then it had not only legs but also arms, so it could be called 'arthropod' by analogy with 'arthropod'.

### ***I FEEL SORRY FOR THE PIGS***

We can also assume that the ancestors of vertebrates were anthropomorphic creatures, similar to humans. It is from them that vertebrates inherited their famous common plan of organisation. In other words, intelligent beings have appeared on our planet more than once or twice. We encounter the non-intelligent descendants of these beings every day. These include our lovely pets — dogs and cats, canaries and budgies. Birds also share the ‘unified structural plan’ that humans possess. But it does not follow from this that humans are descended from canaries, budgies, dogs and cats. Not at all! Vertebrates inherited their characteristics from distant intelligent ancestors who, in some unknown way, once appeared on our Earth and, in some unknown way, disappeared...

In this connection, one might suppose that monkeys are the descendants of humans, rather than their ancestors. Only these humans lived on our planet before the appearance of monkeys and before we ourselves appeared here...

However fantastical such ideas may seem, we find clear parallels with them in myths. For instance, among the peoples living in Indonesia, there is a legend that pigs were once human and walked upright. The ancestors of pigs descended from one twin brother, and the ancestors of humans from the other. One day, the ancestors of the pigs and the ancestors of humans had a falling-out. It turned out that the ancestors of the pigs were in the wrong. And the god-like hero presiding over the trial bent the future pigs to the ground with his staff as punishment, and elongated their snouts so that they would constantly be buried in the earth... Of course, one feels sorry for the pigs, but one must not break the ‘laws’.

The descendants of humans, just as before, walk on two legs and rightfully rule over both their own land and the land of the pigs.

### ***‘THE MONKEY THEORY’ DOESN’T HOLD WATER BECAUSE OF THE FOOT***

As we can see, myth-making continues and  
to this day, in our  
‘Age of Enlightenment’. Scientific myths are being replaced by other scientific myths...

One of these scientific myths is the so-called simian theory of human origins. 'Simia' is Latin for 'monkey'. The authorship of the 'monkey' theory is attributed to Darwin, although similar ideas had been expressed long before him by many learned men, such as Aristotle.

According to Darwin, the fossilised ape *Dryopithecus*, which lived in the Tertiary period, climbed down from the tree and began to walk upright. Engels developed this assertion, adding his labour theory to Darwinism. The development of the hand and labour, according to Engels, transformed the ape into a human.

However, somehow, in the shadow of the 'developed' hand, with its opposable thumb, yoga emerged with a thumb that was not opposable at all. In apes, it is prehensile; in humans, the foot is a support, incapable of opposing the big toe.

This circumstance led many scientists to doubt that the ape was the ancestor of humankind. The Soviet anthropologist V.V. Bunak, the English anatomist Frederick Wood Jones, the American palaeontologist G. Osbor, and the anthropologist G.A. Bonch-Osmolovsky believed that monkeys are unsuitable as human ancestors precisely because they have a prehensile foot, and it is impossible to convert such a foot into a supporting one.

Most likely, the opposite process occurred — bipedal ape-like anthropoids climbed trees, transforming their 'human-like' foot into a grasping one. To do this, they had to 'tear' the metatarsal ligament connecting all five toes and transform the straight joint of the big toe, situated between the first metatarsal and cuneiform bones, into a ball-and-socket joint. Thanks to this, the ancestors of apes managed to turn their foot into a sort of hand. Supporting themselves on four points of contact, apes began to leap nimbly from branch to branch.

#### ***HOW TO RESIST THE TEMPTATION TO CLIMB A TREE***

Recent discoveries in Chad and Kenya support this scenario. The remains of ape-like, bipedal creatures were found there. These creatures were given the scientific names:

Sahelanthropus tchadensis and Orrorin (Ancestor). These creatures lived around 7 million years ago. It was at this time that the evolutionary lines of humans and chimpanzees diverged in Africa. Perhaps one of these similar bipedal anthropoids, having ‘broken away’ from the ground and bipedalism, climbed into the trees and became the progenitor of the chimpanzee line, thereby losing the ‘human’ foot and transforming it into an ape’s.

Thus, the apes may not have descended from the trees, as Darwin claimed, but, on the contrary, may have climbed up into them.

This hypothesis is further supported by the fact that, for a long time, it was believed that Australopithecus had a ‘transitional’ foot, somewhere between that of an ape and a human. However, in 1976, fossilised footprints were discovered in volcanic ash at Laetoli (Tanzania). These footprints were virtually identical to those of modern humans. It became clear that the Australopithecines, who lived in Africa around 3.7 million years ago, were just as capable of walking as modern humans and had a distinctly human foot, not an ape-like one. Evidently, both Sahelanthropus tchadensis and Orrorin were bipedal and did not possess a ‘transitional’ foot. This conclusion can be drawn from the characteristics of their fossil remains. Thus, it can be said that the foot is debunking the myths about human descent from apes. The ape did not climb down from the tree to become human; rather, one might say that the ape-like human became an ape by climbing up a tree. Evidently, modern humans too need to keep well clear of trees, lest they be tempted to climb them. Before you know it, one of us modern folk might turn into an ape...

In light of this, a question arises: where did humankind come from? To understand this, I think it is best to turn to myths – not scientific ones, but traditional myths...

In Russian folk tales, humankind is born of Mother Earth. The archaic word ‘**zemlyak**’ (literally ‘**earthling**’) points to the miraculous emergence of humankind from the womb of Mother Earth. In folk myths, the origin of humankind is conceived as a miracle, which, of course, contradicts the ‘natural origin’ of humankind from the ape tribe, as evolutionists—beginning with Charles Darwin—naively suppose...

## Chapter 4. WHAT DOES YARILA HAVE IN COMMON WITH SAINT GEORGE

This chapter discusses the fierce nature of the Slavic fertility deity Yarilo, how Yarilo's funeral rites were conducted in Rus', the curious resonance between the name Yarilo and the names of the Greek gods Arest and Eros, how Yarilo warms the earth every spring, the functional similarity between Yarilo and the Roman god Mars, Yarovita's shield, which possesses a magical function just like Mars's shield, the young and old Yarilo, the resemblance between Yarilo and Adonis and Osiris, the commonalities between Yarilo, Il and the Elohim, where the Russian paradise of Iriy was located, how St George replaced Yarilo, the spring festivities of the young, the fire-walkers, love, spells, and charms, as well as the fact that water and fire are symbols of love.

### *FIERY YARILO*

So, let us return to Slavic myths. In the pantheon of Slavic deities, one of the foremost places was reserved for the god Yarilo. Spring rituals designed to ensure the fertility of the land and the clan are associated with this god's name. Yarilo embodied the fierce (procreative) principle. Thus, V.I. Dal writes that **a 'yarun'** is an animal in heat. To illustrate his point, Dal cites the following folk sayings:

'A camel in heat can be cross', 'A capercaillie in heat trembles when it displays'. Among other things, in Russia, **'yarovoy'** referred to annual grain sown in spring and harvested in autumn. The people used to say: 'Yar crops grow well. Sow spring rye and wheat at the full moon. Oats two days before and after...'.

As for the deity itself, V.I. Dal writes:

'Yarilo, Yarila m. an ancient Slavic god of fertility, from whom the earth and all living things come to life... Yarila walks through the fields, makes rye grow, brings newborns, etc.' Yarilo's Day used to be celebrated on 27 April. In Belarus, on this day, a young man was dressed in a colourful costume,

They adorned her with ribbons, flowers and bells, and applied rouge to her cheeks. Children announced Yarpla's procession with a drum roll. Thus began the Yarilo festival—a celebration. Following Yarpla came young men and women, singing bawdy refrains and folk verses... Sometimes a young maiden would be dressed as Yarila; people would dance in circles around her and sing spring songs — special folk songs of a rather risqué nature, such as: *'The bride and groom are a couple, like a ram and a ewe'*; as well as riddles of a bawdy nature: *Yarilko ran out from behind the stove, began to court the woman, only the stick is tapping...* In the latter case, the reference is to a broom.

### **PLOUGHING AND SACRIFICE BEFORE PLOUGHING**

Yarilo's connection to the earth is quite evident. **Oralo** or **ralo** — the ancient name for a plough — bears a striking resemblance to the proper name Yarilo. It is interesting that in folk tradition the ploughshare was called **rožen**. Could this be derived from the word *rožat* (to give birth)? To this day, archaic expressions have survived:

'What's the point?', 'Don't get on the wrong side of the plough!' The ploughshare was also called a '**ralnik**'. A folk saying has survived: the right *ralnik* is a woman, the left is a man. Here we see clear symbolism of fertility.

The cult we are discussing here has its roots in ancient times. For instance, archaeologist A. Shchepinsky describes an ancient stele — a unique monument of the Kemioba culture dating from the late 3rd to early 2nd millennium BC, discovered in 1925 at the Bakhchi-Eli site. This site is now located within the city of Simferopol in Crimea. The stele was found having been reused as a covering for an earthen grave. Originally, it had been buried vertically in the ground and evidently symbolised the reproductive organ of the deity of fertility. Images are carved on both sides of the stele. On one side, a plough (a farming implement), oxen and a yoke are depicted, as well as the figure of a living person with arms outstretched above the plough. On the other side, the same scene is shown, except the person is lying face down. According to Shchepinsky, this depicts a ritual scene of preparing the land for ploughing. According to other experts, it

it cannot be ruled out that this depicts a ritual human sacrifice to ensure fertility. Some experts believe that this depicts a fertility deity — a god who dies and is reborn. The upper part of the stele features recesses for offerings during ritual ceremonies, which nevertheless suggests that actual sacrifices took place at the base of the stele.

Thus, the fertility deity, associated with sexual symbolism, was by no means of a peaceful nature from the outset.

### **THE FUNERAL OF YARILA**

In Belarus, Yarilo was dressed in white robes and placed on a white horse. In his right hand, Yarilo held a human head; in his left, a handful of rye ears. Some experts believe that the head in Yarilo's right hand is a remnant of human sacrifice, which was practised in ancient times during the festival marking the arrival of spring. However, this head may also testify to Yarilo's belligerence, as he fulfilled the role of the god of war in ancient times. Some suggest that the head in his right hand is the deity's own head. It is as if he temporarily removes his own head—going mad under the influence of spring and love.

Many experts note the eroticism of the image of Yarila. As the historian V. Demin writes in his book *\*The Secrets of the Russian People\**:

*'The spring festival of Yarila, which survived into the 20th century and was described in detail by ethnographers, was essentially a historically transformed version, rooted in Slavic soil, of the well-known Dionysian cult with its indecent organic rituals.'*

According to the scholar, a defining feature of the Russian Yarila was an emphatically large phallus made from a log. And the ritual itself culminated in the imitation of sexual intercourse. V. Demin believes that these features of the festival were an echo of a distant Indo-European tradition. At that time, to ensure the earth's fertility, it was necessary to impregnate a woman on a ploughed field.

According to a Russian chronicle, in Voronezh on Yarila's Day, men and women in their finest attire would gather at dawn outside the city on a large clearing. Yarila was chosen from among the men. Then a general revelry began with songs and dances, which usually ended in a fistfight.

According to V.I. Dal, in the Tambov and Ryazan provinces the funeral of Yarila was celebrated on 30 June. A similar festival took place in Kostroma. An old man, dressed in a tattered robe, carried a doll of Yarila in a coffin with 'genitals protruding'. Drunken women accompanied the doll with sobs, and then buried it in the ground. In Galich, on this day, an old man was chosen to play Yarila; he was plied with drink, and the girls danced in circles around the drunken old man. In the Kazan Governorate, villagers danced in honour of Yarila in the fields, where they had previously sprinkled their livestock with holy water. In this, V. Demin sees a continuity between Russian and Indo-European traditions. As is well known, the Indo-Europeans had a cult of the fertility bull.

#### ***YARILO. ARES. EROS***

Demin explores the etymology of the word Yarilo. The scholar concludes that the Russian root 'yar' derives from the Aryan root 'ar'. In particular, the Avesta mentions the homeland of the Aryans — Aryana Veda — literally 'Aryan expanse'. The root 'ar', in a slightly altered form, is still present today in the names of countries such as Iran, Iraq, Syria and Saudi Arabia. It is clear that the names of these countries are in some way connected with the history of the Aryans.

The historian also draws our attention to the fact that in Greek mythology there was a god named Ares. This god of war is characterised by cunning and treachery. He wages war for war's sake, to achieve a sense of ecstasy in battle. This god can quite rightly be described as fierce. In Homer, Ares is depicted as a violent deity, characterised not only by a fierce nature but also by romantic infatuation. It should also be noted that in Rome, Ares was identified with the Italic god of war, Mars. Evidently, the name Mars itself derives from a modified form of the Greek god Ares.

Furthermore, among the Hittites, who lived in the late 2nd millennium BCE in the territory of modern-day Turkey, there was a god of war named Yari. In Akkadian mythology, there was a god of war named Erra. The names of these gods are also similar to both the name Ares and the name of the Slavic deity Yarilo.

V. Demin also points out the similarity in the pronunciation of such divine names as Yarilo and Eros (Erot). In the latter case, the similarity is not only phonetic but also semantic. As is well known, in Greek mythology, Eros is the god of love, the son of Ares and Aphrodite. With his arrows, he strikes at the very heart of whoever he wishes to make fall in love.

The semantic connection between Yarilo and the Greek pantheon can also be traced in the fact that the unbridled and hot-tempered Hera was formerly known as Yara.

#### ***HOW YARILA WARMED THE EARTH***

In the Indo-European language, there was a group of concepts denoting temporal cycles. At the root of this lies the ancient root ‘yar’ (‘yar’, ‘aer’); the word ‘era’ clearly derives from this. It is possible that the word ‘yar’ — ‘year’. In Old Russian, however, the word ‘yara’ did not mean a whole year, but only a part of it, namely spring. This is the origin of the name of the spring god Yarila.

The modern Russian word ‘god’ also has ancient origins. It appears to date back to the Proto-Indo-European language. Thus, in Sanskrit there is the word ‘gy’. This word means ‘bull’ or ‘cow’. This meaning has been preserved in the Russian language in words such as ‘govyado’ — ‘beef’. In Sanskrit, ‘gv’ also means ‘stars’ or ‘rays of light’. Perhaps this refers to a ‘cosmic cow’ that gives birth to all living things on Earth and in the cosmos. This also points to a semantic connection with the Russian word ‘god’ (year).

It is known that the image of Yarila was sometimes identified in the popular imagination with a solar deity. Thus, a legend that has survived to the present day

, recorded in the Nizhny Novgorod Governorate, states:

*‘In ancient times, the Earth was shrouded in darkness and cold. Until the god Yarila came and warmed the Earth with his heat, and illuminated it with his light. Then a man was born from the bowels of the Earth. At first he was senseless. Then Yarila enlightened the man’s mind with his lightning. From that time on, man became the ruler of Nature, he became intelligent...’*

A similar folk tale was used in the spring fairy tale ‘The Snow Maiden’.

### **THE FURY OF MARS**

In modern Russian, words such as ‘fury’, ‘fierce’ and ‘vivid’ are associated with the name of the god Yarila. Here is the definition of the word ‘fury’ given by V.I. Dal: ‘Fury, ferocity — a quality denoting intense anger, malice, savagery, brutality, frenzy; a burst of senseless, elemental force’. Dal cites folk proverbs and well-known expressions: ‘The chained dogs suddenly turned on the pigs’, ‘The dog turned on the other dog over a bone’, ‘To enrage a beast’ (this resembles the modern expression — don’t awaken the beast in me), ‘He got into a fight without leaving the platform’, ‘The zealous one got carried away’,

‘Play on the violin’, ‘A man in a rage is mad: like a bear charging at a spear...’. V.I. Dal also cites some highly archaic expressions found in Russian chronicles: ‘I fear you, for you are a fierce man...’, ‘A fierce man is not well-mannered...’, ‘The Ovarian helmets, hardened by sabres, are scraped by you, O fierce Ture Vsevolod’. The latter expression is taken from ‘The Tale of Igor’s Campaign’... ‘The fierce eye of the Saviour’ refers to an icon of the Saviour with a punishing gaze.

Thus, the Russian language contains quite a few words and expressions with the root ‘yar’, which indicate that the god Yarilo, in ancient times, was endowed not only with a fertility function but also with a military one. This brings Yarilo closer to the Greek Ares and the Roman Mars. It is interesting to note that the Italic peoples dedicated the first month of the ancient calendar—March—to Mars. It was then that the rite of banishing the old, exhausted Mars took place. The place

of the old Mars was taken by the young Mars. His arrival was widely celebrated by the people with festivities, round dances and unbridled merriment. A number of scholars believe that Mars was originally a chthonic deity of fertility, and only later did he become the god of war. In the past, a sacrifice—a bull—was offered to Mars on his day, just as it was to Silvanus, the god of the forests.

### ***YAROVIT'S SHIELD***

Among the Baltic Slavs, Yarovit was considered the god of fertility. Rituals in his honour were held on 15 April. This is attested to by highly authoritative sources. Thus, according to the chronicle of 1128, a temple to Yarovit was erected in the vicinity of Vologoscha (now Wolgasch, Germany).

Yarovit was also considered the god of war. Therefore, a shield hung on the wall of his sanctuary, which was not to be touched in peacetime. However, when war broke out, this shield was taken down and carried before the army.

This bears a striking resemblance to the ritual performed by the Romans in honour of the god Mars. The symbols of Mars were a spear and twelve shields, which were placed in the sanctuary of Mars on the Campus Martius. According to legend, one of the shields fell from the sky. This shield personified the invincibility of the Romans. By order of King Numa, eleven replicas of this shield were made. They were placed in the sanctuary of Mars, alongside the original, so that enemies could not distinguish the real shield from its replicas and steal the sacred object.

On the king's orders, a commander would set the spear and shields in motion before the start of battle, calling upon Mars for help and protection. Touching the shields and the spear in peacetime was strictly forbidden on pain of death. Doing so could bring about untold misfortune.

Based on the similarities between these aspects of the cults of Mars and Yarovit, it can be surmised that their prototype was once a single Indo-European god of fertility and war.

## **YOUNG AND OLD YARILA**

It is clearly possible to reconstruct certain details of the festival of Mars, once held on the Field of Mars (where a temple to Mars, the god of war, was later erected), based on the characteristic features of the Yarila celebrations. As late as the 20th century, in the Nizhny Novgorod, Simbirsk, Ryazan and Yaroslavl provinces, 'yarilki' or

'Yaril games', which were timed to coincide with the first day of the Peter's Fast, Ivan's Day. In Poshekhony, Yaroslavl Province, 'Young Yarila' was celebrated a week before Ivan's Day, and 'Old Yarila' on the very day of Ivan's Day.

Literary scholar N.M. Mendelssohn described how Yarilki were celebrated in 1860 in the Zaraysk district of the Ryazan province. Mendelssohn notes that on the night of the last Sunday before Peter's Fast, young people would set off down the river to a hill known as 'Yarila's Bald Spot'. Married people were not allowed at the Yarilki celebrations. A distinctive feature of the festivities was the lighting of a large bonfire on this hill, the singing of songs 'with a reason', as well as wild orgies that lasted until dawn. When Mendelssohn asked the local residents who this Yarila was, they replied: he approved of love.

In the Yaroslavl Governorate, a custom also persisted before the revolution which was quite eloquently called 'burying Yarila's bald patch'. At the start of the festival, young men fashioned a life-sized anthropomorphic figure of Yarilo from straw and clay, with pronounced masculine features. Opposite it they placed a figure 'Yarilika' was placed opposite him. The merry young people would lift the dolls of Yarilo and Yarilika and mimic sexual intercourse. After the festivities, in the morning, the dolls were smashed and thrown into the river. The meaning of the expression 'to bury Yarilo's bald head' is also by no means coincidental. The word 'plesh' in Russian folk dialects meant the male sexual organ.

This ceremony was part of a ritual designed to bring fertility to the earth. No wonder the people used to say: 'On Yarilo's Day, the earth comes into bloom'. In some places, such as the Volga region, on Yarilo's Day — the start of the St Peter's fast — a similar ritual was performed: a straw effigy of Yarilo was made, paraded through the village, and then sent off by being burnt on a bonfire or drowned in the river. Sometimes this effigy was called 'spring' or 'mermaid'.

The villagers believed that by performing this ritual, they were ‘seeing spring off’.

### ***ADONIS RESEMBLES YARILA***

In terms of his symbolic significance, Yarila is also similar to Adonis — a Greek god of Phoenician-Syrian origin. Adonis also personified the fertility of the earth. He was associated with the periodic death and rebirth of nature. According to Greek myth, Aphrodite was angered by a king’s daughter who had failed to honour her, and inspired the girl with a passion for her own father. The father succumbed to the girl’s seduction, unaware that she was his daughter. When he learnt the truth, he cursed her. The gods transformed the unfortunate girl into a myrrh tree, from whose cracked trunk, at the appointed time, a child was born — Adonis... The gods began to argue over who the child rightfully belonged to. Zeus settled the dispute, declaring that Adonis would spend part of the year in the realm of the dead and the other part on Earth.

And so it has been ever since. Adonis became a ‘seasonal’ god, dying and rising again. According to legend, Adonis was killed whilst hunting by a wound inflicted by a wild boar sent by Artemis.

The cult of Adonis existed in Syria, Egypt and Phoenicia. In Byblos, at the sanctuary of Aphrodite, orgies were held in honour of Adonis, accompanied by sacred prostitution. The first day of the festival was devoted to mourning, and the second to rejoicing at Adonis’s resurrection. Legend tells of the River Adonis, which turns red every year, when, according to tradition, Adonis perishes in the mountains of Lebanon. In Alexandria, the marriage rites of Adonis and Aphrodite were celebrated lavishly. All this was accompanied by orgies in their honour. The following day, the statue of Adonis was carried to the sea amid wailing and weeping and immersed in the water. This symbolised the god’s return to the realm of the dead. In Athens, during the festival of Adonis, images of the dead were displayed everywhere.

## ***THE TRANSFORMATION OF OSIRIS***

Apart from Adonis, there were other deities who personified the productive forces of nature. Thus, throughout Egypt's long history, the cult of Osiris endured. He was usually depicted seated amongst trees or with a vine entwined around his figure. This interpretation draws a parallel between Osiris and the Greek Dionysus — the god of viticulture.

When depicting Osiris, the Egyptians always painted his figure green. This emphasised that Osiris was a seasonal deity. According to legend, Osiris taught people to plant vineyards, make wine and sow cereals. Osiris dies every year and is reborn to life. The life force is always preserved in Osiris, even in death. In Egyptian burials, one sometimes finds a canvas stretched over a frame depicting Osiris. Spelt or barley grains are scattered over this canvas. The Egyptians believed that if the grains sprouted, Osiris would come back to life.

This miraculous resurrection found expression in the myth of Osiris, who was treacherously murdered by his own brother, Set. However, Osiris's sister, Isis, found her brother's dismembered body and buried it. The only part of the body that was not buried was Osiris's phallus. With its help, Isis conceived and gave birth to her son Horus, who avenged his father's death. From the end of the New Kingdom onwards, Osiris began to be depicted with a solar disc above his head. Thus, Osiris appears as a solar deity who annually awakens nature to life. During the Hellenistic period, Osiris is depicted in the form of the sacred bull Apis. The solar halo above his head is retained.

## ***YARILA, ILU, ELOHIM AND THE BULL***

It is quite curious that the name of the Russian god Yarila is homophonous with the name of the Egyptian god Osiris. In turn, the name of the god Osiris is homophonous with the name of the country — Syria. Perhaps this is evidence that our distant ancestors — the Proto-Russians — believed that paradise — Irpy

was situated somewhere in the region of present-day Syria. The fabulous exuberance of life characteristic of Syria's ancient natural landscape could well have been perceived by the Proto-Russians as an evergreen paradise where there is no death or decay. However, in the middle of the second millennium BC, the climate of the Eastern Mediterranean changed, and the inhabitants were forced to leave these lands, which had become a lifeless desert.

Meanwhile, the Phoenicians, who once inhabited the Eastern Mediterranean, had a god who personified the productive forces of nature — Il. In a different transcription, this god's name sounds like Ilim or Elim. (Evidently, this is also the origin of the common name 'Fields of Elysium' — paradise). The name of the Phoenician god Elim is similar to the Greek abode of the gods — Mount Olympus. Furthermore, the name for the Greeks — the Hellenes — is also similar to the name of this Mediterranean god.

In Hebrew, the Phoenician name Ilu is pronounced Elohim. The ancient Jews believed that Elohim was the creator of all things; of gods and humans. It is he who bestows offspring upon humans and animals. Among the Phoenicians, the god of fertility, Ilú, was depicted as a bull. This interpretation of the image of the god of fertility brings him closer to the Old Russian god Yarilo. The etymology of the word itself points to this quite unambiguously.

According to V.I. Dal, in Russia a young bull was called a **'yarovik'**; whereas a working ox with a yoke placed upon it was referred to as a **'yaremny'**. In some regions of Russia, a cow was called a **'yarka'** or **'yarochka'**; evidently, the word 'doiarka' derives from this. However, the word

'doiarka' is also linked to the word **'yarit'** in the sense of milking. As for the meaning of the word **'yarmo'** — a wooden yoke around the neck of a working ox — the well-known phrase **'yaremnaya vpadina'** (yoke hollow) refers precisely to the hollow in a person's neck between the collarbones, which, in turn, closely resemble the yoke on the neck of working cattle.

According to V.I. Dal, the Old Russian word **'yarytsy'** referred to military armour, plate armour and a helmet. This indirectly suggests that Yarilo, in times past, also had a military role.

#### ***OSIRIS, SYRIA, IRY AND THE 'PROMISED LAND'***

It seems to me that the similarity in the pronunciation of the words Osiris, Syria and Iriy is no coincidence. Perhaps our distant ancestors once lived in the 'Promised Land'. Nor is it a coincidence that the morning star is called Sirius, which shines particularly brightly at the latitudes of the Eastern Mediterranean and Egypt. In ancient Egypt, the drama of Osiris's death and resurrection was re-enacted during a great agricultural festival timed to coincide with the Nile's greatest flood. The Nile's flooding was linked to the particular position of Sirius in the sky.

A festival symbolising the revival of fertility in nature was already being held in Mesopotamia in the 3rd millennium BC on the days of the spring and autumn equinoxes. As is well known, according to the calendar, the spring equinox falls on approximately 22 March, and the autumn equinox on 22 September. These dates are also marked in the folk calendar of Rus'. In late March and early April, the festival of Yarila was celebrated, and in late September, the harvest festival. It is possible that our distant ancestors, through the Russian language, brought into our consciousness the story of paradise — Iria — which once lay on the shores of the Mediterranean. It is quite remarkable that the name of the heavenly bird-maiden of Syria — a favourite character in folk songs and fairy tales; her image was often depicted in house carvings — also reminds us of Irin, the Proto-Slavic paradise. However, it is said that the image of the Russian bird-maiden dates back to the ancient Greek sirens. Who knows, perhaps the Slavs and the Greeks once shared a common paradise — the paradise of the Indo-Europeans.

### ***YARILO AND ST GEORGE***

Following the adoption of Christianity in Rus', St George (or Yuri, or Yegor) took on this image and some of these functions. Evidently, St George borrowed the white colour of his clothing and horse from his ancient predecessor. Thus, Belarusian incantations state: '... the Lord God rode out to us on a white horse and in white robes to enclose our livestock with iron fences, to lock them with golden keys...'

On the coat of arms of Moscow, St George is depicted on a white horse, wearing a helmet and holding a spear, piercing a winged serpent. Some researchers see in this depiction of St George a hint of a certain erotic subtext; since ancient times, the winged serpent has symbolised the fruitful forces of nature. This interpretation draws a parallel between St George and Perun—the god of thunder, who pierces his sworn enemy, the serpent Veles, with a bolt of lightning.

The identification of Yarila with Yuri was also facilitated by the similarity of their names. The roots ‘yar’ and ‘yur’ have closely related meanings in the Slavic languages. Thus, according to V.I. Dal, in Rus’ a **‘yur’** was the name given to a lively, restless person; **‘yurom’** — a lively, open space where people bustle about — a bazaar, a market. In the Smolensk Governorate and in the Bulgarian language, the word **‘yur’** denoted fury, lust, or desire. The Ukrainian word **‘yuriti’** means ‘to rage’; the Polish ‘jurzycsie’ — ‘to rage’, ‘to be angry’, whilst ‘jurny’ means ‘lustful’. In Russia, a **‘yurodivy’** was a mad, blessed person whose behaviour manifested itself in unconscious actions possessing a hidden meaning (hence the expression ‘a holy fool for Christ’s sake’). **‘Yur’** also refers to a rapid in a river; and **‘na yuru’** means ‘on a high place exposed to the winds’.

***THE PRIEST WAS ASKED TO PROSTRATE HIMSELF ON  
THE GROUND***

The proximity of Yarila and St George is also indicated by the calendar proximity of the feast of Yarila (late April) and St George’s Day (23 April). The church calendar contains two days commemorating St George — the spring

— 23 April and the autumn one on 26 November. Indeed, whatever the weather, 23 April was always the day when livestock were taken out of the yard onto the street for the first time.

From St George’s Day in spring, just as previously from Yarila’s Day, summer begins according to folk belief. On this day, the peasants, driving the livestock out into the street, sang:

‘Give Yury the ringing keys,  
Unlock the beautiful spring,

Beautiful spring, warm summer...”

In some regions, there was a custom of rolling in the dew on this day. Thus, in Polesie on Yuryev Day, young lads and lasses, pairing up, would roll about in the rye. Their parents would let their daughters go without any fear, advising them: ‘If you roll about with a lad, may he love you and marry you...’. In the Smolensk Governorate, on Yagory’s Day, women would go out in droves into the fields and roll about there naked. This ritual was considered particularly important for ensuring a bountiful harvest. Rituals of similar significance were also performed on Easter Sunday. As ethnographers report, in the Kaluga Governorate, after the prayer service on Easter Sunday, women would ask the priest to roll around on the ground so that ‘the sheaves might be heavy and the crops bountiful’. If the priest refused to do so, the women would throw him to the ground and roll him about by force. In the Ryazan Governorate, they acted in exactly the same way at Easter, explaining their actions as a wish for a better flax harvest.

***‘BURN, BURN BRIGHTLY, LEST IT GO OUT’***

As A.N. Afanasiev writes in his book *\*The Tree of Life\**:  
“The worship of Yarilo and the wild, licentious revelries... in the pagan imagination were clearly associated with the sacred triumph of life over death, of spring over winter; for Christian moralists, these were ‘acts’ that were impure, accursed and demonic. Despite this, the ancient custom did not readily yield to the exhortations of preachers; until quite late, the Yarilo festival allowed for free declarations of love, kisses and embraces, and mothers willingly sent their daughters to flirt at the festivities...”

As the folk sayings go: ‘Love is not a fire—once it ignites, you cannot extinguish it’, ‘Better to burn seven times than to be widowed once’. According to Afanasyev: ‘...from Bright Week, when the goddess Lada, patroness of marriage and childbearing, was honoured, when nature itself enters into its fruitful union with the god of thunder and the earth

begins to bear fruit", the spring games of the young people, known among the people as the "Gorelki", would begin. Unmarried lads and maidens would line up in pairs in a long row, and one of the lads, chosen by lot to "burn", would shout: "I'm burning, I'm burning, stump!". 'Why are you burning?' a girl's voice would ask him. 'I want a fair maiden.' — 'Which one?' — 'You, young lady!'

A.N. Afanasyev cites folk words and sayings associated with this game: ogaryshi, ogorelysh, oprel (from pret'), as well as 'burn, oak', 'burn, stump', 'burn, burn brightly, so that it does not go out'.

### ***SPELLS AND 'PRISUSHKI'***

A.N. Afanasyev, in his book 'The Tree of Life', also cites folk spells 'for love' that were used by young people in their day. Here is one of them: 'As on the sea, on the vast ocean, on the island of Buyan, there is a white, flammable stone—the Alaty; upon that stone stands a fire-heated bathhouse; in that bathhouse lies a burning plank; upon that plank are thirty-three pangs of longing. Fly, pangs of longing, rush, pangs of longing, into the fair maiden, into her heady mind, into her back and face, into her clear eyes, into her sweet lips, into her ardent heart, into her mind and intellect, into her will and desire, into her whole white body, so that a fine young man may be dearer to her than the white light, dearer than the radiant sun, dearer than the beautiful moon...'

These spells were known as 'prissushki'; they had to be recited over bread, water or wine. One was then to offer these concoctions to one's betrothed at a suitable opportunity.

On page 116 of the aforementioned book, the researcher also quotes a spell from a 1769 investigation file:

'I shall go, brave lad, and look out across the open field towards the west, beneath the damp earth, and I shall fall with my head upon the damp earth, bow down and pray to Satan himself: O Satan, my lord! Come to my aid, O my servant, a host of demons and devils with burning fires and scorching flames, and with boiling keys, and let them go to the young woman and, at my valiant command, set her soul and her body ablaze...".

Thus, the person uttering this incantation was quite consciously appealing to pagan deities acting as demons and devils.

Afanashev quite rightly considers that such incantations and 'spells' date back to the most ancient layer of folk consciousness. He defines this layer as the Slavs' poetic views of nature.

### ***THE FIRE SERPENT WILL HELP IN LOVE***

Thus, according to A.N. Afanashev, our ancestors perceived a thunderstorm as a marital union between heaven and earth. Numerous incantations, divinations and rituals were based on this notion. Afanashev writes that the principal symbols of lightning were arrows, and those of rain were honey and wine; and both play an important role in the wedding ceremony. Thus, in folk tales, the tsar gives his sons a red-hot arrow and says: 'Make yourselves a crossbow and shoot at the red-hot arrow; wherever the arrow falls, take a bride from that household'. From this, it is clear why the bride's plait was parted with an arrow, and the comb used to brush her hair was dipped in honey and wine. In the hayloft where the newlyweds were laid, arrows were fixed in the corners and above the wedding bed. On the second day of the wedding, the cover under which the bride lay was lifted with an arrow. Afanashev writes:

'The arrow appears here as a metaphor for lightning, with which Perun pierces the clouds, brings down rain and removes the veils from the sky. In the wedding rite, the arrow serves as a symbol of fertility and, at the same time, is an instrument that sanctifies the marital union.'

The author cites several more examples of folk incantations in which the connection between love and the forces of nature is clearly evident.

'On the sea, on the ocean-sky, stood a tomb-cloud; in that tomb lies a maiden-lightning. Arise, awaken, dress in a colourful gown, take flint and tinder, kindle your heart with zeal...'

'I shall rise and go out into the open field. There I shall meet Fire and Blaze, and the wild Wind. I shall rise and bow low before them and say thus: O Fire and Blaze! Do not set the green meadows alight, and O wild Wind, do not fan

the blaze; but render a faithful, great service: take from me this aching longing and this weeping melancholy, carry it through the pine forests—do not lose it, over the rapids—do not let it fall, across seas and rivers—do not drown it, but place it in the maiden's white bosom, in her ardent heart, so that she may long for me and grieve day and night and at midnight; that she may not eat sweet delicacies, nor drink mead or beer'

Similar invocations are also directed at the fiery serpent. Among the Rus', the god Veles was the personification of the fiery serpent. Thus, the heavenly deity is simultaneously a deity of love.

### ***FIRE AND WATER — AS SYMBOLS OF LOVE***

According to the metaphorical language of the Slavs, the pleasures of love are symbolised by the act of drinking water. This is unequivocally attested to by a folk tale with 'subtext'. It tells of a fine young man who arrives at the court of the Tsar-Maiden, who at that moment was fast asleep in a deep, unbroken slumber... The handsome young man was captivated by her charms and defiled the maiden's beauty... and he himself quickly mounted his horse and galloped away, without even making the bed. The Tsar-Maiden awoke from her sleep and said in anger: 'What a boor was in my house, drank the water, and did not cover the well!'

Since the heavenly flame—lightning—was a metaphor for the fire of love, and the heavenly moisture—rain—was a metaphor for fertilisation, there are many divination practices associated with this. For example, an unmarried maiden blows the flame from a coal onto a splinter; if the splinter takes a long time to catch fire, her husband will be disobedient, with a harsh, wayward character. If the splinter flares up immediately, her husband will be affectionate, kind, and indulgent of his future wife's whims.

When the young woman lights the splinter, she sticks it into a log. As she does so, she notes which way the ashes fall from the log. Her future husband will come from that direction.

The young woman dips the splinter in water and then lights it. If the splinter takes a long time to catch fire, it is believed that her future marriage will be an unfavourable one.

There are quite a number of such divination rituals. They are based on a metaphorical association between the elements of fire and water and future married life.

It is quite curious that the theme of the sacred marriage of fire and water is also played upon by all Indo-Europeans. Perhaps this image has a single source of origin. Thus, in distant India, divinations using fire and water are still widespread to this day.

## Chapter 5. KOSCHEI THE IMMORTAL — KING OF THE UNDERWORLD

This chapter explores possible interpretations of the deity Yariło; the similarities between him and folklore characters such as Mara, Maslenitsa, Marya and Marena; how our ancestors churned butter with a spinning wheel and sowed seeds on the snow; whether a ship on wheels ever existed and who was carried across the snow in a boat; as well as the ancient Slavic deity Kariye; Don Carnival; rolling spinning wheels down a hill; about Kostroma, her funeral and merry laughter; about the phallic cult; about Koschei the Immortal; about Orpheus and Eurydice; about Ivan Tsarevich and Elena the Beautiful, and about the Frog Princess.

### *YARILO — ARILO*

It is evident that in times past, the god Yariło, in addition to fertility, also fulfilled a military function. This is indicated by words similar in pronunciation: yadro (projectile), artilleriya (artillery), arbalet (crossbow), oruzhie (weapon), zarad (charge), orat (to shout), orda (horde), etc. It can be assumed that the vowel ‘ya’ may have been replaced over time by other vowels: ‘a’ or ‘o’. However, in practice, things may have been different — there was a different substitution — the name of the Proto-Slavic ‘war’ god originally sounded like Arilo. Words relating to the military function were derived from this god’s name. The root ‘ar’ is also traditional for Indo-Europeans; it can be found, for example, in the word ‘Aryan’.

In the name Yariło, one can also hear the verb ‘**ryt**’, familiar to our ears, meaning ‘to dig’. This is clearly linked to the function of fertility. Before sowing seeds in the ground, the soil was broken up and ploughed. It is quite curious, however, that the verb ‘**to plough**’ (**pahat**) resembles the noun ‘**lust**’ (**pokhot**). Perhaps these two words are connected by more than just a superficial similarity in sound. Our ancestors believed in the fruit-bearing power of spring nature.

This was expressed in the celebration of the ‘return’ of the sun, when the days begin to lengthen and the nights to shorten. Evidently, this is reflected in words such as ‘to illuminate’ (ozaryat), ‘dawn’ (zarnytsya), and ‘dawn’ (zarya). In spring, nature awakens from its slumber and its fruit-bearing power is reawakened. This was associated with moisture, which fell upon the earth in the form of rain. Our ancient ancestors believed that morning and evening dew also served a fertile function. This is evidenced by words such as ‘to irrigate’ and ‘to sprinkle’. In them, we see the same root ‘or’ — ‘ar’.

### ***MARENA, MARA, MASLENITSA***

The ancient Slavs had a deity called Marena or Mara. An effigy of this deity was fashioned from straw in time for the spring equinox — 22 April — and then, after the festive week, it was burnt, and the ashes scattered across the fields so that ‘the harvest might be bountiful’. In later tradition, this festival is known as Maslenitsa. Maslenitsa was depicted with her hair loose and a frying pan in her hands. During Maslenitsa week, people celebrated, went out, and baked pancakes, which symbolised the sun.

Maslenitsa’s ‘funeral’ was accompanied by carnival processions, ritual laughter and all manner of revelry. Maslenitsa was known as the ‘glutton’ or the ‘pancake-eater’.

Among the Czechs and Slovaks, this festive week was called Masopust and concluded with the ritual of ‘carrying out death’ — a symbol of winter. A straw effigy, called Marena or Marzena, dressed in a festive costume, was carried out of the village. The costume was torn to shreds, reduced to rags. The effigy was then thrown into the water or torn to pieces. The straw was scattered across the fields. This was supposed to ensure a good harvest.

Perhaps, in times past, a human sacrifice was offered to the deity on this day; and only later was it replaced by an anthropomorphic doll.

It is also striking that the name Mara, Marena is phonetically similar to Arilo, Yarilo. This may indicate that in

In times past, these characters from Slavic folklore shared a single prototype. Later, Marena evolved into Marenka and Maria; in Slovak, she became Marmurena. Some linguists believe that there are phonetic and semantic parallels between these Slavic deities and their Italic ‘counterparts’: the Old Latin Marmor and the Oscan Mammers. This provides a phonetic link to the name of the ancient Roman deity Mars. Marena was regarded as the embodiment of death. She facilitated the passage to the realm of the dead, as well as the rebirth of the soul in a new body. It is no coincidence that one of the Italic names for this deity sounds like Marmor (Marble). Evidently, the statues, which were made of marble, were originally intended to personify the deity who acted as a guide to the world of the dead and to the world of the living.

#### ***MARUT, MARUTS, MARA AND MARS***

It is quite curious that in ancient India, Marut, the deity of rain, storms, wind, thunder and lightning, was worshipped. Later, the name of this deity was reinterpreted as Maruts and came to be used in the plural. This name came to denote a multitude of elemental deities symbolising the wind; among them, for example, Vayuga

— a name that sounds very similar to the Russian word ‘v’yuga’ (blizzard). Rudra is considered the father of these deities. The Russian word ‘ruda’ (ore) can be discerned in this god’s name, and perhaps even the word ‘trud’ (labour). When the Maruts, led by Rudra, rush across the sky in a swarm, they inspire fear and terror. However, Hindus turn to this host of winds with pleas for help when drought strikes, so that they might ‘herd’, like a herd of cows, the rain clouds and bring down the rain...

It is interesting that, in their sound, the names of the deities Marut or Marutas resemble the deities Marena, Mara, Marmor, Mars... On the other hand, in the Slavic names Mara and so on, the word ‘death’ can be discerned. The connection with the other world is quite obvious. It is likely that our distant ancestors believed that violent winds blew literally from the other world, bringing storm clouds which then poured down upon the earth as life-giving rain. Thanks to this, all living things are brought back to life.

## **MARYA AND MARIA**

It can be surmised from this that Mara and similar deities did not originally have a negative connotation. They played an important role in the rite of awakening the life-giving forces. This assumption is supported by the deity Marja or Marsha, who is deeply rooted in Latvian mythology. This goddess is the protector of cows. The cow is an animal that has been associated with fertility since ancient times. Later, Maria replaced Mari. This is unequivocally evidenced by the customary invocations addressed to her: **‘Dear Maria, mother of Jesus Christ of the cattle, protect us from sorcerers and witches!’**

As folklore experts point out, the days of Mari partly coincide with the so-called ‘days of Mary’, which are celebrated four times a year: in spring — ‘Cabbage Mary’s Day’ (on this day, not only is cabbage planted, but children are also conceived), in summer — 15 August, in autumn — 8 September, and in winter — at Christmas. On this day, children conceived in spring are born.

This testifies to the continuity of folk traditions and characters. Christian saints have replaced the pagan deities, yet the calendar nature of the festivals has remained unchanged.

## **BUTTER-CHURNING**

The symbolism of the cow is characteristic of Christmas and Shrovetide. At Shrovetide, peasants churn milk into fat, sour cream and butter. As they do so, they chant:

The cows are milky,  
The sour cream is  
thick,  
They skim off the cream,  
They break the spoons,

And throw them out of the window...

Here, the symbolism of churning butter quite clearly corresponds to an erotic subtext.

During Maslenitsa, dishes made from ground grain are also served. The grain is pounded in a mortar with a pestle. Pancakes are baked from the ground grain. These pancakes symbolise not only the spring sun, but also the beginning of new life.

In the Kaluga Governorate, on the Monday of Maslenitsa week, boisterous Maslenitsa celebrations were held. A straw effigy was pulled along on a sledge. Meanwhile, outcasts smeared with soot and hung with cowbells were harnessed to the sledge. Next to the Maslenitsa effigy, a young woman was seated in the sledge, churning butter on a spinning wheel. In this way, the idea of 'churning' butter took on a distinctly erotic meaning. This meaning is also hinted at by a saying often repeated during Maslenitsa week: 'With a stake and some butter'.

Maslenitsa was erected at the highest point outside the village and, on Forgiveness Sunday, amid general laughter and hooting, it was torn to pieces; people took pieces of the maiden's clothing and ribbons for themselves as symbols of family happiness and fertility. Maslenitsa was then burned along with uneaten pancakes, which had previously been smeared with soot. This symbolised the sun-seed being planted in the earth. After this, the sun was to 'be reborn, the harvest was to grow, and many children were to be born'.

In the Kaluga Governorate, Maslenitsa dolls were also made in every home. They were fixed to the roof ridges, and on Sunday they were taken down and burnt in the ovens. The ashes were scattered throughout the yard, as well as in the barn and the livestock pen. This was supposed to ensure fertility both within the family and among the livestock.

### ***SOWING ON THE SNOW***

|                                                     |            |
|-----------------------------------------------------|------------|
| According to experts, Maslenitsa is a typical pagan | festivals. |
| Meatfare, as it was it was in                       | Rus        |

Maslenitsa week is mentioned in the Nestor Chronicle, in a description of the plague of 1090.

Originally, Maslenitsa, with its marked excess and erotic elements, was associated with the start of the New Year. In Rus', this festival was celebrated in March, which further links it to the expulsion of the old Mars in Rome. Rich food and reckless merriment are precisely characteristic of the magic of the first day of the New Year. Unwritten rules demanded that Maslenitsa be welcomed and seen off with generosity. This is evidenced by the saying: 'Even if you have to pawn your own clothes, see Maslenitsa off.' It was believed that if one did not pay tribute to the festival, hardship and bitter misfortune would haunt one throughout the year.

The erotic element of Maslenitsa was particularly emphasised when an anthropomorphic doll was made from straw. If Maslenitsa was depicted in female form, her essential attribute was an exaggerated bust; if in male form, it was an exaggerated phallus.

In the Vologda region, the role of the doll was played by a young man: he would ride about in a children's sledge drawn by young calves and foals. In the Penza Governorate, a young man was carried across the field in an upturned harrow. Meanwhile, the participants in the procession would scatter grain in front of the procession; hence the expression 'to sow on the snow'.

### ***A BOAT ON THE SNOW AND A SHIP ON WHEELS***

In other parts of Russia, the Maslenitsa procession comprised several hundred horses. It consisted of sleighs, sledge, boats and other vehicles suitable for travelling on snow. The procession would go round the whole village, then head out beyond the outskirts. A bonfire was lit in the field, on which the straw effigy of Maslenitsa was burned. Once the bonfire had burned down, young men and women would begin to jump over it, singing:

Farewell, Maslenitsa, the  
Jester.

Tyr, tyr, monastery!  
Lie there, old woman, on the aspen logs,  
Three logs at your head.  
Hurrah!!!

Young men and women rolled about in the snow near the bonfire. They tried to break the embers into as small a pieces as possible and scatter them far and wide, burying them in the snow. It was believed that this would ensure a good harvest.

In a number of provinces, the farewell to Maslenitsa had a distinctly carnivalesque character. The ‘funeral’ of Maslenitsa was accompanied by unbridled merriment and had a mocking tone.

It should be noted that ‘carnival’ is not only the name of the festival, but also the name of a ritual cart — a ship on wheels (in Latin, *carus navalis* — ‘chariot-ship’). An anthropomorphic doll, known as ‘Carnival’, was placed on this cart. This doll was paraded through the village and burnt during the festival marking the end of winter.

Thus, the Russian custom of attaching a boat with a Maslenitsa effigy to the Shrovetide procession dates back to very ancient times. Something similar — a ship on wheels with an anthropomorphic doll — was used during the ancient mysteries of Dionysus, Marduk and other seasonal deities, who personified the god of fertility.

### ***KARNA AND DON CARNIVAL***

In Roman mythology, Carna is the goddess of the underworld. During the festival of Carnaria, offerings of bean porridge and flowers were made to her. On this day, the graves of loved ones were decorated with flowers. According to Ovid, Carna lured lovers into dark caves, where she left them.

It is interesting to note that a similar deity also existed in East Slavic mythology. We know of Karna and Zhela — personified deities of weeping and grief. Thus, in ‘The Tale of Igor’s Campaign’, there are these lines: ‘Behind him cried Karna and Zhela, “Rise up on the Russian land!”’ In an earlier version of the manuscript, the spelling is

spelling: 'Karnaizhlya'. Evidently, in times past this was a single deity.

Folk etymology identifies the root 'kar' with the name for meat or flesh (Latin: caro; Italian: carne). Thus, 'karne-vale' can be translated as 'meat-eater', which corresponds to the Old Slavonic name for Maslenitsa. Many also translate the word 'karne-vale' as a rallying cry: 'Long live the flesh!'. The Spanish Don Carnal or Don Carnaval, fashioned from straw with enormous genitals, embodied the function of procreation. At the end of the festival, Carnaval was subjected to a farcical trial, accused of all sins and sentenced to death. Carnaval was either burned or torn to pieces, and his remains were thrown into the water. According to historians, in days gone by, a slave sentenced to death was burned in place of Carnaval. This symbolic death at the start of the New Year was intended to ensure a bountiful harvest and the prosperity of the people throughout the year.

### ***THE FUNERAL OF MASLENITSA***

Thus, judging by the details of the ritual and the similarity of the names of the divine figures, we can see that Carnival and Maslenitsa are very closely related in terms of their magical significance. Among other things, this points to a possible common origin shared by the Slavs, the Latins and other Europeans.

The burning of Maslenitsa together with the coffin—the box in which she lay—or together with an old boat symbolised the eternal cycle of time. This symbolism echoes that of the ancient Egyptians, who believed that the sun travelled across the sky on a special solar barque. The purpose of the ritual is expressed in folk verses: '...they burnt Maslenitsa so that the bread might grow, so that there would be food for the coming year, so that the flax might sprout.' Many ritual songs also feature the motif of Maslenitsa's own resurrection:

Oh, we've sent Maslenitsa on her  
way. Sent her on her way, my  
dears, sent her on her way,

We've lost our dear one, luli, lost her,  
And we buried her in a little hole, luli, buried her,  
We clapped our little white hands, luli, clapped them, Lie  
there, Maslenitsa, until the swarm arrives, luli, until the  
swarm arrives, Until the good harvest comes, luli, the  
harvest,  
And in the summer we'll dig her up, lullaby, dig  
her up, And roll her out again, lullaby, roll her  
out...

A whole range of memorial rites was associated with Maslenitsa week. On the Saturday before the week began, people would bake pancakes and commemorate the dead: they would place pancakes on the listening window (it was believed that the souls of deceased ancestors could listen through this window to what their living relatives were saying), on the icon stand, on the roof, and also take them to the graves. On Forgiveness Sunday, people would visit the cemetery, converse with the deceased and their relatives, and leave offerings on the graves. In the evening, as they sat down to eat, they would invite the deceased to share the meal with them; for this reason, the table set that morning was left untouched.

### ***RIDING ON SPINNING WHEELS***

However, alongside funeral rites, elements of mocking eroticism were also practised during Shrovetide week. For instance, in the Onega District of the Arkhangelsk Governorate, on the last day of Maslenitsa, a boat was paraded through the village on old wooden carts, in which lay a man with his bare bottom smeared with red minium. On the River Tavda, the organisers of the 'farewell' celebrations, Maslenitsa and the Voivode, stripped naked in front of the assembled crowd and mimicked washing in a bathhouse. In other places, the main character of the festival delivered solemn speeches whilst baring his private parts. It is quite curious that people respected in the village were usually chosen for such roles. And most interestingly, these people viewed their new role as an honourable duty.

An erotic element was also present in the rituals associated with the newlyweds. They were rolled about in the snow, constantly being made to 'redeem'

each other with kisses, and rolled them down hills on animal skins. Afterwards, the newlyweds were placed in a sledge and sent down a slope. Care was taken to ensure the sledge travelled as far as possible. The quality of the flax depended on this. The newlyweds were then thrown into a pile, with the aim of ensuring they ended up at the very bottom.

During Maslenitsa, a ritual known as ‘the kissing ritual’. On the Saturday of the festive week, young men would go round kissing the newlyweds who had married that year. The newlyweds were not allowed to refuse such a courtesy.

Throughout all this, the participants in the Maslenitsa processions did not forget to imitate various types of agricultural work. They ploughed, harrowed the snow, threw wheat grains into it, caught fish, cut sheaves, reaped and threshed flax, spun yarn, churned butter, washed laundry in a trough with snow, and so on.

The ritualised act of young maidens and married women riding spinning wheels down the hill was linked to magic. They did this to the sound of whistling and ululation. It was believed that whoever travelled the furthest on a spinning wheel would have a ‘long flax’ harvest. Evidently, these practices of erotic magic were intended to impart fertility to the earth and ensure a good harvest.

### ***KOSTROMA — LAUGHTER THROUGH TEARS***

Maslenitsa is perhaps the most vibrant folk festival, combining elements of a memorial rite with unrestrained sexual magic.

A similar element is found during the ‘funeral’ of Kostroma. A doll made from unwanted plant foliage (this foliage was called ‘kostr’ or ‘kostrika’ in Ukraine and Russia) was burnt, just like the Maslenitsa doll. Evidently, the name Kostroma is derived from the name of the plant tops, as well as from the word ‘bonfire’. The common word ‘bones’ can also be heard in the proper name Kostroma. This view is supported by the fact that in the Czech language there is a humorous name for a human skeleton — kostroun.

In Ukrainian tradition, a male doll—Kostrubas—was made with pronounced sexual characteristics. After the character's ritual death, the doll was torn apart, and its remains were thrown into the river. This action reveals a connection to both the Maslenitsa festival and the festival of Ivan Kupala.

In Murom and the surrounding area, the young people taking part in the 'funeral' procession of Kostroma sang:

Kostroma, you fool,  
Kostroma, where's your  
head?  
To the devil, to the devil  
Into the whirlpool with your head!

At the same time, the final part of the ritual was accompanied by unrestrained merriment, with young men and women bathing together in the river, engaging in erotic games and other licentious behaviour. This blending of two

'styles' of behaviour was easily explained: according to popular belief, Kostroma was resurrected after her death.

This combination of seemingly incompatible elements was supposed, according to folk beliefs, to serve the revival of Nature's forces.

On Shrovetide, on Forgiveness Sunday, people would visit cemeteries to commemorate the dead. And immediately afterwards, sexual orgies would be organised, featuring the same pies and pancakes. Evidently, such 'absurdities' trace back to the ancient cult of the dead. Once upon a time, people believed that the souls of the deceased could enter new bodies conceived during these spring days of the New Year. Here we are dealing with a clearly expressed idea of reincarnation.

### ***FUNERAL-SEXUAL RITUAL***

Thus, according to Old Russian beliefs, the souls of the deceased returned to earth in the form of children conceived during the festival. The spring funeral-sexual rite was intended to ensure the soul's unhindered entry into a new body.

The memorial-festive Carnival, so beloved in European countries, originally served a similar function. The very word 'Carnival' points to the union of the cult of the dead with the magic of rebirth from non-existence. 'Karna' is the Italic goddess of the underworld. The word 'val' means phallus — the letter 'f' has been replaced by 'v'. It is quite curious that the name of the Italic goddess Karna practically coincides with that of the East Slavic goddess Karna. Evidently, Russian words such as 'karat' ('to punish'), 'korit' ('to rebuke'), 'karat' ('obkarat').

The word '**karma**', which is very frequently used in Hindu terminology, bears some resemblance to and is consonant with 'Karna'. Karma — in its most common sense — is the sum total of all good and evil deeds Committed by a particular person in past lives. It is this sum total that determines in the body of which living being a particular person will be reborn in their next life.

The word 'karma' is, in a sense, synonymous with the Russian word 'pocket'. To put it metaphorically: if you have got into a pocket, you can only get out of it at the very spot where you got in. In other words, one must work off bad karma; only then can one find a way out of the situation in which one finds oneself.

Judging by purely external characteristics, a pocket can be compared to the womb. Perhaps our ancestors, who used language, imbued words with a somewhat different meaning than we do today. It is no coincidence that Eastern religion teaches that one of the reasons for being born into a new body is the inability to resist sexual temptation.

### ***THE TEMPTATION OF THE MOTHER'S GULPING WOMB AND THE CULT OF ANCESTORS***

According to the Tibetan 'Book of the Dead', the womb of the mother, gaping open before the eyes of the deceased, holds a special attraction for the soul...

The Tibetan 'Book of the Dead' requires adherents of Eastern religion to practise asceticism and renounce their own feelings. On the

appearance, our distant ancestors held a different view on this matter. The spring fertility rite, held in the first days of the New Year, was intended to ensure the return of the souls of the dead to the earth. In doing so, the sexual aspect of the ritual was sanctified. This aspect was perceived in the popular consciousness as a kind of duty to deceased relatives who wished to be reborn in the familiar surroundings dear to their hearts. Thus, children and grandchildren

‘pulled’ their deceased relatives back from the afterlife and themselves became their parents. The wheel of samsara — the wheel of rebirth — clearly did not carry the negative connotation attributed to it by adherents of Buddhism and other religions based on self-denial. In the minds of our ancestors, the cycle of birth and death was directly linked to the solar cycle, to the calendar year, which, as it completes its cycle, makes us older and brings closer the hour of our inevitable departure from material existence. Our forebears believed in the magic of fertility. A son brings his father into the light of day, and a father brings his son. In the Hindu tradition, this came to be known as

the ‘cult of ancestors’. This cult dates back to the time of the Proto-Aryan community, when there were no separate Slavs, Italians, English, Germans, Hindus or Iranians. It can be said that the cult of ancestors was vigorously cultivated by the ancient pagan religion and fell into disuse when paganism was replaced by new religions with their morality of asceticism and self-restraint.

### ***THE JELLY AND GRAVE EROTICA***

Nevertheless, numerous elements of folk magic have remained in the collective memory, which to some extent revive the cult of ancestors. For instance, playing the zheleyka — a special pipe used by shepherds, which, according to beliefs once held, gathers not only herds of cows but also the souls of the dead... It is no coincidence that playing the zheleika often served as a backdrop during ‘funeral-sexual’ rituals. The very name of this shepherds’ pipe contains the name Zheli or Zhlya — a personified character of ritual weeping. Young people would ‘mourn’ the souls of their deceased ancestors

and revived them from oblivion, providing them with the new bodies of their newborn children.

In Bulgarian folk tradition, rituals once took place involving sexual acts whilst wearing masks of the ancestors. These masks were kept in a special necropolis alongside the ashes of the deceased, and were taken out of there during the spring festival. In essence, the carnival or masquerade has preserved these traditional elements of the cult. To this day, carnival participants wear masks on their faces, and this in no way hinders overtly erotic acts; on the contrary, it even encourages them. Evidently, in the past, the soul of the specific deceased person from whom the mask was taken (or made) was summoned to enter a specific womb during this commemorative-sexual ritual. Scholars have reconstructed this ritual based on details of the necropolis's décor, discovered in what is now Bulgaria. This necropolis is of considerable age — 4,500–5,000 years old.

### ***THE CULT OF THE PHALLUS***

As the archaeologist A. Shchepinsky writes in his book *\*In the Darkness of the Ages\**, at the turn of the Early and Middle Bronze Ages, around 4,000 years ago, the phallic cult literally flourished in the Crimea. Stone phalluses of varying heights were erected on the tops of burial mounds. For instance, in 1958, a burial mound was excavated near the village of Zolnoe, close to Simferopol. Seven burials were found beneath the mound. A 60-centimetre phallus, carved from stone, had been placed at the top of the burial mound. A. Shchepinsky writes: *'...this clearly indicates some kind of ritual ceremonies associated with the reproduction and renewal of human life.'* The phallic cult was particularly widespread in the Caucasus. Indeed, even today, phallic-shaped stelae can be seen in cemeteries across North and South Ossetia. Sometimes such gravestones reach a height of 4 metres.

The scholar goes on to write:

‘Certain rituals of the pre-Islamic religion of the Adyghe are also linked to the phallic cult of fertility and the cycle of the sun. Here, in ancient times, religious dances were held at the “suk-shaped stone”, during which the breasts of young women were bared.’

It must be acknowledged that in ancient times a fertility religion, entirely unknown to us, flourished. Perhaps the modern tradition of placing a memorial stone on graves, vaguely resembling a phallus, is a kind of echo of this funerary-sexual cult.

A. Schepinsky believes that ‘...the Christian feast of Easter has absorbed centuries-old pagan beliefs and has become a feast of the ‘death and resurrection’ of the divine Saviour. Evidently, before Jesus Christ, the deities of ancient religions—Adonis, Osiris, Dionysus and others, revered as gods of vegetation and agriculture—‘rose from the dead’. Gradually, the element of ‘resurrection’ came to occupy a central place in the Christian festival of Easter, whilst ‘Easter of Suffering’ gave way to ‘Holy Week’...

On the first Sunday after the spring equinox and the full moon, Christians celebrate Easter, accompanying the preparations for this ritual with the blessing of Easter cakes, the baking of sweet pastries, and the dyeing of eggs. And it is unlikely that any of the faithful have ever wondered why the festive ceremony is always associated with baking sweet pastries, which must have a specific elongated shape, and with the dyeing of eggs...”.

The archaeologist believes that these Easter attributes were borrowed from an ancient phallic cult.

### ***THE LOAF — AS A METAPHOR***

The phallic cult found its embodiment not only in Easter cakes, ‘which must have a specific elongated shape’, but also in wedding karavays. This ceremonial round loaf has long been a metaphorical expression of the male sexual organ among the Eastern Slavs. It is no coincidence that

province, newlyweds were presented with a loaf into which two eggs were meaningfully placed. Quite often, one wedding loaf with phallic symbols moulded from dough represented the groom, whilst another loaf with symbols of the female reproductive organ represented the bride. However, more often than not, one half of the wedding loaf represented the groom, and the other the bride.

It is worth noting that the word 'karavai' or 'korovai' itself contains the word 'cow'. Indeed, a figure of a cow or bull was often depicted on the wedding loaf, which was considered a symbol of fertility and childbearing.

The word 'karavai' resembles the name of the ancient Slavic goddess of death, Karna; there may be not only a phonetic but also a semantic connection here. The birth of new life is, in one way or another, linked to the theme of death. This is also reflected in Russian folk tales. Thus, the evil spirit of death, such as Koschei the Deathless, often separates the young couple by abducting the bride straight from the wedding. The heartbroken groom sets off in search of his bride to the realm of death, where, having overcome many obstacles, he destroys Koschei the Deathless. In doing so, the chains of the realm of death are broken, and the hero is reunited with his bride. Along with the bride, many people who were previously bound and held in dungeons are set free. Here we see that the figure of Koschei the Deathless is in some ways analogous to that of Kostroma, whose funeral marks the beginning of a new life. In ancient times, the word 'kosch' or 'koscht' meant 'dry' or 'skin and bones'. This is very close to the name of the spring deity Kostroma. Kostroma's funeral, like the death of Koschei the Immortal, embodies a rebirth into life.

### ***KOSCHEI THE IMMORTAL AND THE KING OF THE HITTITES***

As is well known, Koschei's death is hidden away very securely: 'In the sea, in the vast ocean, there is an island; on that island stands an oak tree; beneath the oak tree lies a chest buried in the ground. In the chest is a hare; inside the hare is a duck; inside the duck is an egg; and inside that egg lies Koschei's death'. Prince Ivan sets out to destroy Koschei, and various animals help him in this endeavour. This interpretation

is analogous to a shamanic ritual, when the shaman climbs the World Tree to the abode of the Supreme Goddess. The shaman is aided by helper spirits—a bear, a deer, a hare, an eagle, and a duck. Ivan Tsarevich's journey to the other world in search of Koschey's death can be likened to a shamanic ritual. Ivan Tsarevich is helped to obtain the egg containing Koschey's death by a bear, a hare, a duck and a pike.

It is clear that the oak tree growing on the fairy-tale island, beneath which the magic chest is buried, is likened in folk poetry to the phallus of the King of Death. By destroying Koschei's egg, Prince Ivan frees his bride from the underworld, along with the souls of the people tormented in the realm of death, whom the evil sorcerer had turned into stone idols. It is worth noting here that the image of stone idols may have a perfectly realistic interpretation. In the ancient world, it was customary to erect full-length stone statues of the deceased above their graves.

Death has once again been trampled underfoot — long live life!

This interpretation of the tale of Koschei the Deathless is the most archaic and dates back to ancient times. It is quite interesting that a similar tale about Koschei the Deathless existed among the Hittites, a people who lived in Asia Minor in the 2nd millennium BC. In this tale, Koschei had all the characteristics of a king of the underworld. He forcibly held hundreds of people captive in the realm of death. He had abducted the young bride of the Hittite king. The hero-king frees the bride and the slaves of death by castrating the tyrant of the underworld. This plot resonates with similar tales depicting ancient gods associated with fertility—Osiris, Adonis, and Dionysus.

***ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE, IVAN TSAREVICH AND ELENA  
THE BEAUTIFUL***

Virtually all Indo-European peoples have stories similar to this one. This may serve as further evidence of an Indo-European common heritage. For instance, the story of Orpheus and Eurydice was widely known among the ancient Greeks. According to Greek mythology, Eurydice was the wife of the Thracian singer Orpheus. She was

a dance with her friends in the forest when she was bitten by a snake. Eurydice died. Orpheus descended into Hades to retrieve his wife, where, with the sounds of his lyre, he appeased the fearsome king of the underworld, Hades, who then allowed him to take his wife away from the realm of the dead. However, there was one condition

— Orpheus was not to look at her until they had left the realm of the dead.

Orpheus could not resist and, on the way, looked back to make sure his wife was following him... and lost her, this time forever. This plot is indeed similar to Russian and Hittite fairy tales.

Clearly, it shared a common mythological foundation with them.

The hero leads his betrothed out of the realm of the dead, and thanks to this, the lovers are united... which, among other things, leads to the continuation of their lineage.

The metaphor of the continuation of the lineage lies in freeing, 'ransoming' the bride from the king of the underworld and bringing kindred souls into the light of day — that is, giving birth to them. In Russian folk poetry, the ritual death of Koschei the Deathless is conceived as his castration. Thanks to this, the souls of unborn people can leave the realm of death.

#### ***THE CALENDAR, THE EGG AND THE 'RANSOM' OF THE BRIDE***

Many folklore specialists see in this a remnant of the initiation rites for young men and women, when the groom must journey to the far-off realm to rescue his bride, who has been abducted by an evil spirit. Overcoming the difficulties encountered and bringing the bride back is perceived by the clan as a duty towards deceased relatives. Perhaps a certain echo of this ritual is the 'ransom' of the bride, as well as her ritualised abduction from her family.

It is quite evident that the rituals of 'ransom', abduction, and the ritual castration of the King of Death were present in wedding customs in Rus', as well as among other Slavic peoples. For example, in the Yaroslavl Governorate, when the newlyweds met after the wedding ceremony, they were served an egg cut in half. This was their first meal together. In Ugrian Rus', the first food eaten

consisted of two eggs and boiled milk. Among the Bulgarians, before the wedding procession set off, the bride's mother would place a raw egg in her bosom, which the groom would break on the journey. In some parts of Romania, the bride, upon leaving her parents' home, was required to step on a raw egg. It was believed that this would ensure fertility, ease childbirth and bring health to the children.

The image of the egg was very widespread in Russia, and it was associated with seasonal rituals and the cyclical nature of time. Thus, a folk riddle goes: *'A log lies across the whole of Russia, and on this log there are twelve nests; in each nest there are four eggs, and in each egg there are seven chicks'*. The answer is: the year, months, weeks and days. According to linguists and folklore experts, the symbolic connection between the egg and time is no coincidence. A person is born and grows up. In due course, they reach sexual maturity and can have children of their own. Thus, the calendar, as a mythological symbol of life, is closely linked in the Russian imagination with the theme of continuing the family line.

The Easter custom of presenting painted eggs to friends and family thus dates back to very ancient times.

### ***THE APOGEE OF LIFE IN THE FAIRY TALE 'THE PRINCESS-FROG'***

The theme of a girl's initiation also features in the fairy tale 'The Frog Princess'. Prince Ivan, taking advantage of Elena the Beautiful's absence, burned her frog skin, thereby hoping to find a lawful wife. However, the opposite happened. When Elena the Beautiful saw that her skin was missing, she was saddened. She says:

‘Well, my dear, I suppose we’ll have to part ways. I can’t live here any longer. I shall go to Koschei the Immortal.

— Why?

— Well, I have six months left to wear this skin. This skin was cursed by my own mother. She cursed me. And so now I must go to Koschei the Deathless.”

The metaphor of the 'frogskin' may symbolise a young maiden's body that has not undergone the rite of initiation—temporary death.

In another similar tale, it is said: 'The old man struck the ground, snatched Elena the Beautiful from the garden and carried her off.' When Ivan Tsarevich reached Koschey's lair, Elena the Beautiful complained to him: 'He gives me no peace, he forces me to marry him and be a faithful wife to him. I do not wish to be a faithful wife to him, but I wish to accept a faithful death.'

Thus, it turns out that even in the afterlife, there is a concept of death. 'That world' turns out to be the inverse of this world. Prince Ivan's journey to **the fairy-tale oak—the World Tree—and his retrieval of the egg containing Koschei's death culminates in the apotheosis of life:**

'Prince Ivan took the egg from his bosom and asked Koschei, "And what is this?" The light in Koschei's eyes dimmed; at once he grew subdued — he submitted. Prince Ivan shifted the egg from one hand to the other — and Koschei the Immortal was tossed from one corner to the other. The prince took a fancy to this and began shifting it from hand to hand more and more; he shifted and shifted until he had crushed it completely—whereupon Koschei fell down and died.'

## Chapter 6. FIRE MYTHS OF THE ARIANS AND SLAVS

This chapter tells of Karachun, who writhes backwards, of Ivan Tsarevich's bride, Elena the Beautiful, of the evil Koshchei, and also of how many suns there are in the sky and whether a black sun exists. It discusses cromlechs—as symbols of the solar calendar—and the ritual fire. It discusses the god Agni and the god Fire. It also covers the ancient Indian cosmogonic doctrine of the Five Fires; the funerary pot as a metaphor for the body; the connection between the 'Path of the Ancestors' and reincarnation; the hymn to Purusha and the 'Book of the Dove'; about Svarog, Svarozhich, Radigost, Svetogor, Sventovit, the Swastika, Svarog, Svahe, Svaga and Svet.

### *KARACHUN. RETREATING*

In Russian mythology, there is a curious character named Karachun or Korochun. He is the embodiment of death, an evil spirit of the underworld. The day of Karachun was the day of the winter solstice, when the shortest day of the year was marked. According to the calendar, this occurs on 24 January, the very day on which Catholics around the world celebrate Christmas. It seems that such a coincidence is far from accidental. The Christian feast of the Nativity of the Lord was superimposed on the ancient pagan festival of the rebirth of the god of fertility. On the day of the winter solstice, the sun begins its journey towards summer — each subsequent day becomes slightly longer than the one before. According to V.I. Daly's dictionary, the folk word '**karachit**' means to recoil or tip backwards. This is precisely what the sun does. After Karachun Day, it increasingly returns warmth and its gentle rays to the earth. It is quite interesting that the word '**karachun**' resembles the proper name of the Slavic goddess of death, Karna. There is clearly a semantic connection here. The seemingly non-Russian words 'reincarnation' and 'incarnation' also have at their root

the root 'kar', which may indicate a return from the world of the dead to the world of the living. According to ancient folk beliefs, this return takes place precisely during the days of the winter solstice. Of course, we can find a certain metaphorical meaning here, linked to the themes of the sun and fertility. However, this meaning could also have been quite real. The souls of the dead return to the world during these winter days. Their conception took place in spring during the spring festivals, and nine months later, around Christmas, the children were born. Karachun is also linked in meaning to the word '**karachki**' — '**on all fours**'. This is precisely how small children move about. Perhaps this is not so much a metaphor as a reflection of reality. After Karachun, after a while, children born around Christmas start crawling. In this sense, the word 'karachki' in the popular imagination may serve as a metaphor for children and childhood in general.

#### **KARACHUN, KRONOS, MOLE**

According to V.I. Dal, the word '**karachun**' means death, the end, destruction. People used to say: 'to give him a karachun' — to kill; 'his karachun has come' — death has come. Clearly, words such as 'to cut short', 'to shorten' and 'short' are linked to the meaning of this word, 'to stop', as well as the colloquial '**kranty**'. Furthermore, these words are similar in pronunciation to the words 'to bury' and 'to keep'. In this case, the letter 'k' changes to the letter 'x'. A similar substitution occurs in Greek words such as 'Kronos' – 'Chronos' (time). Evidently, all Indo-European peoples had a certain basic word meaning the cessation of life with the root 'kar'.

In Rus', Karachun was considered responsible for the death of livestock. It was believed that this god of the underworld took the souls of livestock to his underground stable. In Rus', the term 'Karachun' was often applied to a bear, which, as is well known, moves on all fours and is not averse to killing livestock. All this links Karachun with Veles, as well as with the Indian Vala, who, according to folk myths, stole livestock from the thunder-gods and kept it in the underworld. The Slavic thunder-god Perun, and Indra in Indian mythology, destroy

their enemy's underground lairs and take his cattle. Here we see a typical motif of Indo-European myths concerning the struggle between the thunderer and his sworn serpentine enemy — the ruler of the underworld.

The Russian word 'karchun' also resembles the word **for 'mole'**. Clearly, there is a semantic parallel here. The mole digs underground burrows, hiding from its pursuers.

### ***'KARACHUN DAY' AND KOSCHEI THE IMMORTAL***

It is quite interesting that, according to folk beliefs, the ruler of the underworld does not destroy the souls of the people and animals he has abducted, but merely imprisons them for a time in his dungeons. After a certain time, he releases them and is rendered powerless for a while; or he perishes and is reborn. Here we see a clear parallel with the figure of Koschei the Immortal.

As recounted in the Russian folk tale 'The Day of Karachun':  
'The evil spirit of death sent a chill over all of nature, then sent his servant—a bear—down to earth. The bear turned into a blizzard. All night long he roamed the forests, breaking trees, and, returning to his master, reported that the earth was bound and frozen. Then Karachun crawled out of his dungeon and exclaimed: 'Now I shall roam the earth, freezing people and animals.' All night long, Karachun raged through the forest. Only the trees creaked. However, the next morning the sun rose. It shone so brightly over the forest that diamond sparks rained down from the snowdrifts. Karachun was frightened and slunk back to his underground kingdom. People came out of their houses and said: 'Here comes Karachun; winter is upon us.' When Spring the Fair arrives, things go very badly for Karachun. He suffers from thirst in his dungeon and dies, whilst the people joyfully welcome spring. Here we see a clear parallel with the figure of Koschei the Immortal.

### ***THE BRIDE OF IVAN THE PRINCE IS NO PUSH-OVER***

According to one version of the Rus' fairy-tale myth, Ivan Tsarevich's bride, who was abducted by Koschei, turns out to be no pushover. She imprisons Koschei 'in the dungeon for his misdeeds' (for harassing her); in the dungeon, Koschei hangs by twelve chains, stands on a fiery plank, burns in the flames and boils in a cauldron. Yet he receives no food from his captive bride. He finds himself a prisoner. However, Koschei does not die — he is immortal. He merely loses his extraordinary strength. This strength returns to him as soon as he drinks the water foolishly offered to him by Ivan Tsarevich. Then he breaks his chains and bursts out of the 'cellars'. Like a whirlwind, he begins to fly above the earth. Here, Koschei is likened to another fairy-tale character — Zmey Gorynych.

Koshchei inflicts great damage on nature — '...the leaves flew away, a terrible wind rose'. Thus, we see that the fairy tale of Koshchei contains seasonal motifs of nature's death and rebirth. The worse Koshchei's condition, the more luxuriantly nature blossoms. If he 'feels better', autumn arrives in nature.

Only Ivan Tsarevich's bride is capable of taming the raging Koschei. She runs up to Koschei and says these words:

'Oh, my dear husband! From now on we shall live together forever. Now that Tsarevich Ivan has no golden curls, there is no one to kidnap me. Yet you do not reveal your secrets to me.'

In the end, Ivan Tsarevich's bride manages to coax from Koschei the secret of where his death is hidden. She tells this to Ivan Tsarevich, and he retrieves the egg containing Koschei's death.

### ***ELENA, BEAUTIFUL AS THE DAWN***

Thus, a seasonal motif can be seen in the tale of Koschei the Immortal. When Elena the Beautiful (Spring) is with Prince Ivan, nature blossoms; when Koschei abducts her, nature withers.

In one version of the tale, the proper name 'Koshchei' is pronounced 'Koshshei', which is homophonous with the verb 'toshshiy' (thin). In olden times in Russia, thin people were considered to have one

foot in the grave. Thus, this is an additional factor allowing us to regard Koschei as the embodiment of death. On the other hand, Koschei's captive is called Zari-Zari in this tale. In my view, this suggests that the tsar's bride may be the embodiment of the Sun. Indeed, it is well known that in the northern latitudes, the polar night sets in for several months of the year, when the sun barely rises above the horizon. This natural phenomenon may have served as the basis for the emergence of tales about the Sun being stolen from the sky by the king of the underworld. The return of the sun to the sky with the arrival of spring was conceived in the popular imagination as the ritualised death of the king of the underworld. The hero rescues his bride — the Sun or Zarya-Zarya — from the underworld dungeon. This marks the onset of the polar day, when the sun does not set for several months. Only at night, barely touching the horizon, does it glide above it, illuminating the entire surroundings with a mysterious, fairy-tale light.

#### ***HOW MANY SUNS ARE IN THE SKY?***

According to one version of the tale of Koschei, many captives languish in his dungeons. Every spring, another Hero frees one of them, temporarily rendering the king of the underworld powerless. But every year this story repeats itself. In other words, the Sun or Dawn rising from the horizon is different every year.

This echoes the ancient Egyptians' belief that the sun perishes at the end of each day. A new sun is born of the sky goddess Nut, impregnated by the earth god Geb... The ancient Maya also held beliefs about multiple Suns (cycles). Thus, according to these beliefs, we are currently living in the era of the fourth Sun. On 23 December 2013, a change of cycles will occur. Similar beliefs about Sun-cycles are also found among the Hindus.

The motif of a shepherd abducting the Sun's daughter whilst she is bathing in a river can be found in Georgian folk tales. The wandering shepherd not only 'steals away' the Sun's daughter, but also manages, in the process, to lay waste to

the Garden of Eden. In general, mythological tales about the Sun's daughter are very widespread throughout the Indo-European tradition. One might recall in this connection the Greek myth of Helen. The Russian Helen the Beautiful is in many ways identical to her, which suggests a common source for these fairy-tale myths. These myths are also linked to those about the solar twins — a brother and sister — the sun and the moon.

A Hittite myth dating back nearly four thousand years tells of a time when the great ocean fell out with the sky. It snatched the sun from the heavens. However, the sun god was rescued from his prison by Telepinus, the god of fertility. The Hittites believed that the sun, which they called 'My Sun God', gave birth to humankind. The disappearance of the sun from the sky at night was explained as the machinations of the malevolent king of darkness and death, the lord of the underworld.

### ***CROMLEHS — A SYMBOL OF THE SUN***

According to archaeologist A. Shchepinsky, the stone circles surrounding burial sites — cromlechs — have since ancient times been regarded as the embodiment of the sun. Thus, in Crimea, most cromlechs were constructed around burial sites dating from the 3rd to the early 2nd millennium BC. The grave containing human remains was surrounded by stones in a circle, symbolising the passage of time, the span of life and the sun's movement across the sky. Ancient people believed that in the afterlife there was a 'stone sky', and that across that sky, just as here, a 'black sun' travelled. It rose, set and illuminated the land of the dead with 'black light' — darkness.

According to A. Schepinsky, the cross has also symbolised the sun since ancient times. In the archaeologist's view, the cross originally imitated a cross-shaped fire-making tool. (Fig. Cross-shaped fire-making tool. According to A. Schepinsky). The cross within a circle was revered as a symbol of the connection between heavenly fire (the sun) and earthly fire.

Shchepinsky writes:

'Thus, among the pagan Slavs, the cross was a symbol of fire and possessed purifying power. Until recently, there was

a custom of bringing a lit candle from the church on 'Maundy Thursday', the flame of which was used to burn crosses onto the ceiling beams. The ancient Slavs believed that fire was a message from heaven: it gave rise to the sun, the moon and the stars'.

An interesting depiction of a solar symbol was found on a bronze axe dating from the turn of the 2nd and 1st millennia BC, discovered in Kerch. In addition to the sun, it depicted a sacrificial animal — a bull.

On the walls of a cave in Karabi-Yayla (Crimea), several circles resembling wheels with spokes, scratched with deep lines, have been found. Undoubtedly, these symbols also represent the sun. Similar images were widespread in Eastern and Western Europe. Here, the sun is likened to a wheel that 'rolls' across the sky.

### ***THE SACRED BULLS OF THE SUN***

It should also be noted that many steppe burial mounds are arranged in a circular shape with four entrances and exits. The mounds were surrounded by circular ditches with four passages. It is believed that ritual fires were lit in these ditches. Furthermore, a fence with four passages is a favourite motif in Indian art. If one connects these openings with lines, the result is an image of a cross within a circle, i.e. once again a solar symbol.

Sacred bulls of the sun are also known in the Trypillian culture. These are depictions of bull's heads with solar discs between their horns. As Academician B. A. Rybakov noted in his study, this highly distinctive symbol leads us to the cult of the sun god Mithras, associated with the sacred bull. It should also be noted that in ancient Egypt, the deity Apis, who took the form of a bull, was one of the central figures in solar myths. When the earthly incarnation of Apis—the sacred bull—died, he was buried in a special sarcophagus with a pomp and splendour surpassing even that of a pharaoh's funeral. Hundreds of such burials were found in the underground labyrinths of the memorial city of tombs, Memphis. As Egyptologists suggest, the underground chambers of this city were the site of mysteries associated with

the rebirth of new life, as well as sacred rituals designed to ensure fertility for the land and its people.

It is quite curious that similar burials of the sacred bull—albeit far less elaborate—can be found in the Northern Black Sea region. Furthermore, stone depictions of a bull's head were found in burial sites near Simferopol and Odessa. The ritual of burying a stone bull's head at the Usatovskoye burial ground near Odessa was accompanied by human sacrifices. This burial site was surrounded by a double circle of stones — a cromlech.

Echoes of the bull cult miraculously and quite unexpectedly manifested themselves in Christianity as well. In miniatures from the 16th–18th centuries, one can find depictions of the evangelist Luke with a bull's head.

### ***THE SACRED BONFIRE AND THE SUN***

The connection between heavenly and earthly fire is characteristic of the entire Indo-European culture. Thus, in ancient Rus', there was a custom during Maslenitsa of setting alight a wheel doused in tar. This custom symbolised the return of the sun after its winter captivity. In many places, a cartwheel with old brooms and bundles of straw tied to it was rolled down from a high place or from the riverbank. As it fell, sparks flew in all directions from the wheel, which were believed to fertilise the earth. The highlight of the festival was a large bonfire, which was lit on high ground or on the ice of a lake or river. The fuel for the fire consisted of old, dried-out tubs, broken-down sledge and cart bodies, pieces of old wattle fencing, straw from old bedding, empty tar barrels, old spinning wheels and furniture, wheels and rakes and harrows without tines, worn-out bast shoes, tattered clothing, and brooms made of bare twigs. The children had spent the week gathering all this from the yards, chanting:

Spruce, birch  
On Clean Monday Is this  
not firewood after all:

Osip's firewood,  
Birch firewood,  
Bring it here to us,  
For Maslenitsa, for the bonfire...

The fuel for the bonfire was stacked in a special way — in several layers over the course of several days. In the centre of the future bonfire, a Maslenitsa doll was secured to a tall pole.

The bonfire, as we can see, turned out to be magnificent. If it was built on the ice of a body of water, the ice beneath the bonfire would often crack and melt from the intense heat, and the entire multi-tiered bonfire, still burning, would sink into the water, symbolising the ritual drowning of Maslenitsa. Around it ran a joyful crowd of children with burning 'pomozki' — bundles of straw stuck on sticks — as well as with burning wreaths of twigs.

According to folk beliefs, the fire of the Maslenitsa bonfire not only possessed purifying properties but also entered into a mystical connection with the heavenly fire—the sun—intensifying the sun's radiance and hastening the arrival of spring.

### ***FIRE — AGNI***

One cannot help but marvel at how closely the attitudes towards the heavenly and earthly fires of the ancient Rus' and the Indo-Aryans coincide. Here is what the Indologist V.A. Pimenov writes about the Aryans' attitude to fire in his book *\*Return to Dharma\**:

‘The Aryans were so accustomed to the fact that fire was present in one form or another in all their rites that the universe itself appeared to them as a vast ritual bonfire. In the Upanishads, the focus is no longer on ‘material’ fire, but of the symbol of fire; not of the flame burning in the hearth, but of the universe, which, according to the beliefs of ‘the best among the Brahmins’, is also a kind of fire.”

The attitude towards earthly and heavenly fire is perhaps best expressed in the Chandogya Upanishad. Let us merely note here that the word

‘Upanishad’ literally means ‘sitting at the feet (of the teacher)’ and is regarded as a guide for ‘the best among the Brahmins’. The Indian tradition interprets the Upanishads as ‘the culmination of the Vedas’. In the words of one scholar: ‘The Upanishads represent the next successive stage in the development of Aryan society in the Ganges Valley’. It could be said that in the Upanishads, the Vedic wisdom of the Brahmins is superseded by the wisdom of the Kshatriyas. However, there is no clear contradiction between the Vedas and the Upanishads here. In the Vedic tradition, fire—the fire god Agni—acts as a mediator between the gods and humankind. It is Agni who serves as the messenger to the gods, sent by the Brahmins during the sacrificial rite. Agni is both the element of fire itself and the god who embodies it. Meanwhile, in the minds of the ancient Hindus, fire also had another aspect. As V.A. Pimenov writes:

*‘Agni is a domestic figure in the Vedic pantheon... Agni is a fiery horse, a fiery bird flying between heaven and earth, a giant with red hair, many eyes and golden teeth, with which he devours forests. Yet at the same time, Agni is the ‘master of the house’, kindling the flame in the hearth. Without him, the life of every family is impossible...’.*

Images of fire as a giant, as a fiery bird, as the ‘master of the hearth’ are familiar and understandable to the mytho-poetic consciousness of the Russian people. Such images are often found in Russian fairy tales. Indeed, the Russian word ‘fire’ itself bears a striking resemblance to the ancient Indian word ‘agni’.

### **THE TEACHING OF THE FIVE FIRES**

So, here is how **the Teaching of the Five Fires** from the Chandogya Upanishad presents itself to us:

‘Truly, Gautama, that world is fire. The sun is its fuel, its smoke is the sun’s rays, its flame is the day, its embers are the moon, its sparks are the stars...

Truly, Gautama, a thunderstorm is fire. The wind — is its fuel; the clouds are its smoke; lightning is its flame, the flashes

are its embers, hail is its sparks...

Truly, Gautama, the earth is fire. The year is its fuel, space is its smoke, the night is its flame. The cardinal points

— are its embers, the spaces between them are its sparks... Truly,

Gautama, a man is fire. Speech is his fire, his breath is its smoke, his tongue is its flame. His eyes are its embers, his hearing is its sparks...

Truly, Gautama, a woman is fire. Her womb is her fuel, her seductive speech is her smoke, her vulva is her flame, that which a man inserts into her is her embers, her passion is her sparks.

Into this fire the celestial beings pour their seed as an offering. From this pouring offering, the foetus is born...

After the foetus, wrapped in the umbilical cord, has lain for nine months—or however long it may lie—it is born.

Once born, it lives until its time is up. Then, when it dies and departs from this world, its body is cast into the fire from which it came into being, into the fire from which it is destined to be reborn again and again.'

Thus, according to the Upanishads, the human body, having been born of fire, returns **to** fire; and the funeral pyre becomes a kind of metaphor for man's return to the bosom of the sacred cosmic fire.

### ***THE FUNERAL URN AS A METAPHOR FOR THE BODY***

It is highly significant that in times past, the cremation of the dead was widespread amongst virtually all Indo-European peoples. The ashes were poured into an urn — a pot whose shape vaguely resembled the human body. The pot had a body and a neck; two handles symbolised two arms. Often, the pot containing the ashes was covered with a lid shaped like a mask or the head of the deceased. The deceased's helmet was placed on the head. Among some peoples living in the Northern Black Sea region, as well as among

the Etruscans, the urn containing the ashes was placed inside another vessel shaped like a hut with a door serving as a lid.

Thus, this ritual reflected people's belief that the body, born of cosmic fire, returned to it. All that remained was a shell literally made of earth in the form of a clay vessel. Evidently, this is the origin of the common expression that our body is merely a vessel, a receptacle for the spirit.

By burning the body on a ritual pyre, our ancestors helped the soul of the deceased to pass more easily into another state of existence. It was believed that this facilitated rebirth in a new body. Evidently, our ancestors were guided by the same considerations as far back as the Palaeolithic era, when they laid the deceased in the so-called foetal position with their legs and arms drawn up. The grave pit was often round in shape, and its walls and floor were sprinkled with red ochre, symbolising the womb.

### ***'THE PATH OF THE ANCESTORS' AND REINCARNATION***

Thus, the idea of reincarnation — rebirth — was very popular amongst ancient peoples for many thousands of years. In the Vedic tradition, this idea found expression as the 'Path of the Ancestors'. Upon dying, ancestors are reborn and become the descendants of their own offspring. And so it continues through countless generations. Descendants must fulfil their duty to their deceased relatives, namely to give birth to them and raise them in the traditions of their forefathers. It was believed that a Brahmin (priest) must be born into a Brahmin family, a Kshatriya (warrior) into a Kshatriya family, a Vaishya (merchant) into a Vaishya family, and a Shudra (labourer) into a Shudra family. This would ensure the continuity of generations.

It is quite interesting that the first three castes believed that it was not enough simply to give birth to and raise a person; they also had to be initiated — introduced to the secret meaning of the varna (caste). Hindus call this rite *upanayana*, or 'second birth'. Hence the 'higher' castes are considered 'twice-born'. The descendants

of the indigenous Shudras of Indostan, according to the Aryans, were born only once. On this basis, they were not considered full members of ancient Indian society. As we know, caste views are remarkably resilient. To this day, they shape the worldview of Hindus. However, the caste system likely has its advantages. Perhaps it is thanks to this system that Hindus maintain the continuity of generations. One might suppose that, thanks to this system, souls who were once Brahmins are born into the Brahmin lineage; just as Kshatriyas are born into the Kshatriya lineage, and so on. In this way, the caste system has provided a mechanism for reincarnation from ancient times to the present day.

### **HOW CASTS (SOCIAL CLASSES), THE MOON AND THE STARS CAME INTO BEING**

It is most intriguing that the system of social classes is illuminated by the ancient Aryan tradition. It is reflected in the Vedic hymn about the primordial man, Purusha. This hymn paints before us a magnificent picture of the creation of the world:

‘Purusha — thousand-headed,  
thousand-eyed, thousand-footed,  
covering the earth on all sides,  
rose above it...  
Purusha is the universe,  
Which exists eternally;  
Purusha is the lord of the  
world, He is immortal,  
For Purusha eats the food which  
he himself produces.  
Then the gods sacrificed Purusha; his  
mouth became the Brahmins,  
His hands became the Kshatriyas (warriors). His  
thighs became the Vaishyas.  
From his feet were born the  
Shudras; the Moon was born  
from his spirit, from his eyes  
the Sun was born, from his  
mouth Indra and Agni, from  
his breath the wind was born,

From his navel arose the air, From his head arose  
the sky,  
From his feet came the earth,  
From his ears came the cardinal points.”

Many scholars note that this verse about Purusha from the Rigveda resembles a verse from the ‘Book of the Dove’ — a monument of Old Russian literature:

‘White light shone forth from God’s face.  
The righteous sun — from His clear eyes The  
moon shone — from the nape of His neck,  
The morning and evening dawns — from God’s  
eyebrows, The stars, so numerous — from God’s curls.  
The gentle wind — from His  
sighs, The fine rain — from His  
tears...  
The Orthodox peasants came into being  
From that lineage of Adam;  
And from that same lineage the female sex also began...’

As we can see, the peasant class and the ‘female sex’ trace their lineage back to the first man, Adam (from his thigh), just as the classes of the ancient Hindus trace their lineage back to various parts of the body of the first man, Purusha. It seems that this is not merely a coincidence. It is likely that the mythology of the Rus and the Hindus is based on a certain archaic layer of shared mythological concepts. Moreover, the parts of the cosmos—the sun, the moon, the stars, the sky—originate from various parts of the deity’s face and head. Here the coincidence is almost complete.

***THE HYMN TO PURUSHA AND THE ‘BOOK OF THE DOVE’***

Although the Purusha Hymn from the Rigveda is far older than the verses from the 'Book of the Dove', it seems to me personally that the Russian poetic work possesses distinctive features not found in the Indian Purusha Hymn. Thus, the 'Book of the Dove' describes, in essence, the creation of humankind:

We possess the mind and reason of  
Christ Himself, Christ Himself, the  
King of Heaven; Our thoughts come  
from the heavenly clouds; We are a  
people descended from Adam;  
Our bones are strong as stone;  
Our bodies are of the raw earth;  
Our blood-ore is of the black sea.

Thus, this Russian poetic work illustrates how the world was created from various parts of the deity's body. In this section, the verses of the \*Book of the Dove\* coincide with the hymn to Purusha. However, the 'Book of the Dove' it is shown that the various parts of the human body originate from natural objects: bones from stones, bodies from the damp earth, blood from the black sea, thoughts from the clouds of heaven...

In this part part 'The Book' presents a highly archaic layer of the folk consciousness — where a deity creates the world out of itself, and then creates humankind from the elements of the world. Here we see that the deity is likened to the macrocosm, and humankind to the microcosm, whilst there is a logical connection between the two acts of creation. The hymn to Purusha lacks such depth. It, is, more straightforward. And this is despite the fact that 'The Dove's Book' essentially contains Christian rhetoric. However, this merely emphasises the archaic, pagan nature of the poems' content.

***AGNI, RADIGOST, SVAROZHICH, SVAROG***

The image of fire in the hymns of the Rigveda is quite intriguing. In the Vedas, one of the names of the god of thunder was Agni. He is 'golden-toothed and golden-bearded' and is invoked as the god of thunderous flame. He possesses brilliant lightning and 'loud-mowing black cows' (clouds). In the form of a golden-haired serpent (lightning), he splits the sky and pours torrents of rain down upon the earth. A fierce and mighty bull is the personification of Agni... He is called 'born of water'—the grandson of water, the grandson of the rain-bearing cloud.

A similar interpretation of celestial fire was prevalent in ancient Rus'. According to A.N. Afanasyev, the embodiment of divine fire in Rus' was the god Radigost. Like Agni, he is the god of the golden-haired serpent of lightning, the slayer and devourer of clouds (heavenly cows). At the same time, Radigost, the embodiment of fire, is a radiant guest who comes to Earth every time spring arrives. A.N. Afanasyev claimed that Russian villagers still honour the heavenly fire, referring to it as **a guest**. And indeed, the heavenly fire, like a guest, arrives in spring, bursting forth as lightning from the heavens to the earth during a thunderstorm. Evidently, this is the origin of the name — Radigost. The root 'rad' means — brilliant, joyful, enlightened; 'gost' — a modified word

'Guest'. This is how Adam of Bremen — an 11th-century German historian who studied the culture and way of life in Scandinavia — describes the famous city of the Redes:

'Reträ is the capital of idolatry; there stands a great temple dedicated to the gods, the chief of whom is Redigast (Radigast). The city is surrounded on all sides by a deep lake, and can be entered via a wooden bridge. But only those who wish to offer a sacrifice to the deities or receive an answer from them are allowed to enter...'

A similar account is found in the writings of Thitmar, Bishop of Menzeburg:

'In the land of the Redarians there is a city called Redigost... There is nothing in the city but a temple, skilfully constructed of wood... Its walls are adorned on the outside with marvellous carvings. Inside stand man-made gods, fearsome in their helmets and armour; each bears his name inscribed upon him. The chief among them is Svarozhich; all pagans revere him and worship him more than any other god.'

## **SVARGA, SVAROG, SWASTIKA**

It should be noted that the Slavs called the sacred fire, which burned eternally in their sanctuaries, Svarozhich. They regarded him as the son of Heaven

— Svarog. The Baltic Slavs called Svarozhich Radgost. His attributes were a sacred horse and a spear. The symbol of Radgost was a huge boar that emerged from the Baltic Sea and returned to it. This boar was the zoomorphic embodiment of the sun.

The Eastern Slavs regarded Svarog, the god of fire, as the father of the sun. The Ipatiev Chronicle of 1114 records the following on this subject: ‘...for this reason they called the god Svarog... and in the seven kingdoms his son is named after the Sun; they also call him Dazhbog... The Sun, the son of Svarog, is none other than Dazhbog’.

It is quite interesting that in Hindu mythology, the paradise where Indra, the god of thunder, dwells is called **Svaroga**. This solar paradise is the abode of the divine beings. Mortal heroes may also visit it at the invitation of the god of thunder. After death, brave warriors enter this solar paradise, where they enjoy life until the time comes for them to be reborn on earth.

Russian words such as ‘**svarganit**’ (to swargise), ‘**svarka**’ (quarrel), ‘**svarit**’ (to boil), ‘**svarchik**’ (welder), ‘**svarliava**’ (quarrelsome), etc., point to the fiery nature of Svarog, the god of the ancient Slavs.

The ancient Indian word ‘**swastika**’ has since time immemorial meant a cross with curved ends, which in Eastern religions was interpreted as a symbol of the sun, a sign of its generosity. Due to the fact that in modern times the swastika was used by the fascists as an emblem of the ‘Aryan ideal’, this ancient symbol has acquired a negative connotation in the modern consciousness.

## **SVAKHA, SVAGA, SVENTOVIT, SVET**

The pronunciation of the word 'swastika' is similar to that of another ancient Indian word, '**svaha**' ('**svaga**'). With the exclamation 'Svaha!', the Brahmins signified a sacrifice to the god of fire. This exclamation is analogous to the invocation 'Bless!', addressed to God. The words 'svaha' and 'svaga' are similar in pronunciation to the proper name of the Slavic deity of fire, light and the sun — Svarog. This reveals their closeness.

The epic hero Svyatogor also has a name similar to that of the Slavic deity. In the Russian epic, Svyatogor is so heavy that 'Mother Earth' cannot bear his weight. Svyatogor meets his end in a huge stone coffin. The bogatyr decided to 'try on' this coffin, but was unable to lift its lid. In one of the bylinas, Svyatogor is called Gorynych, which correlates him with the Serpent Gorynych — a fiery serpent. This also suggests that there are certain semantic parallels between Svyatogor and Svarog. The root 'sva', obviously, in the ancient times of the Indo-European community signified belonging to the fiery, solar principle. Thus, in the Western Slavs there was a 'god of gods' named Sventovit. Cultural centre of Sventovit was situated in a four-pillar temple in the Baltic-Slavic city of Arkona. The roof of this temple was purple, a purple curtain enclosed the sanctuary, and chests contained purple robes for the clergy. It is believed that Sventovit personified the crimson sun setting into the waters of the Baltic Sea. A deep connection between Sventovit and the god of thunder is also noted. The epithet 'holy' was often applied to

Perkūnas (Perun).

The word '**holy**' was quite common in Rus. It meant belonging to the world. One might recall the phrase 'The Holy Family'. This clearly indicates a deep connection with the word '**light**'.

## Chapter 7. STONE PEOPLE

This chapter tells of how the god of thunder pierces the clouds with his mace; of the golden-winged bird of the sun; of the magic of the clan; of why our ancestors tied together a poker and a broom; of spirits turned into demons; the connection between the heavenly fire and the fire of the family hearth; the house-spirit grandfather and his mischievous nature; the forefather Chura and his wooden sculptures; the devil, unlike any other; the white, flammable alatyre stone; of sheep turned to stone; of magical objects hidden beneath the sacred stone, of the sleeping host; of the half-men guarding the slumber of the sleeping giants.

### *HOW THE THUNDER GOD DRILLS THROUGH THE CLOUDS*

In his time, A.N. Afanasiev wrote:

‘The Indo-Europeans believed that the god of thunder kindles the lamp of the spring sun, which had been extinguished by the king of darkness and gloom. To do this, the god of thunder spins his lightning-fast mace like a drill in the hub of the sun’s wheel or in the tree-cloud, thereby summoning the flames of the storm.’

Everything in the world is built upon identity. The world of the gods and of Nature is identical to the world of man. Pointing to this identity, Afanasyev wrote:

‘Among the Indians, Persians, Greeks, Germanic peoples and the Lithuanian-Slavic tribes, there existed an ancient method of making fire. To do this, they would take a piece of soft wood, make a hole in it, insert a hard branch wrapped in dry grass, rope or tow, and rotate it until friction produced a flame; often, instead of a piece of wood, the hub of an old wheel was used.’

Here, the ritual of kindling fire acquired an additional mystical connotation — in Indo-European beliefs, the Sun was likened to a wheel. This image was already widespread in the deepest antiquity. Perhaps the proper name Svarog has a close, indissoluble connection with the word **‘to drill’**.

The ritual of kindling the sacred fire was likened to the union of the Sky God and Mother Earth. Our distant ancestors also believed that there was an unbreakable link between kindling fire by friction and carnal desire, born of the fire of love. Fertile rain was identified with carnal seed. Our ancestors believed that the first human descended into this sublunary world from Heaven in a flash of lightning, amidst the howling of the wind and the claps of thunder. The fiery rain that fell upon the earth in the form of the first humans gave rise to the origin of present-day humanity.

### ***THE ‘ORIGINAL SIN’ OF THE SUN***

Since time immemorial, the First Man has been conceived as a fiery bird that descended from the heavens. The First Man was personified as a golden-winged eagle or falcon. In Indian tradition, the myth persists to this day that Agni, the god of fire himself, descended to earth in the form of a golden-winged bird and brought with him the solar twins, born of the sun. It was from them that the human race originated.

After all, in the Biblical version of the creation myth, Eve gives Adam an apple from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Having tasted this apple, both ‘saw the light’. Who knows, perhaps the mythological ‘apple’ is nothing other than the sun, which endowed the first humans with the fire of desire. Paradise, meanwhile, was situated on the Sun, as indirectly attested by the Hindu name for paradise — Svarga, where the god of thunder dwells. The word itself sounds similar to the Russian word ‘sverkanie’ (sparkle). And indeed, in paradise, according to common beliefs, everything sparkles, glitters and shines; everything radiates light. On the other hand, the word ‘sverk’ is, in all likelihood, onomatopoeic. When lightning strikes during a violent thunderstorm, its sound is very similar to a certain word, ‘sverk’ or ‘sverkh’.

(Perhaps this is the origin of various words containing the particle 'sverkh' — 'superhuman', 'superconsciousness', 'super-genius', 'superego' (according to Freud), etc.)

The ancient Indo-Europeans believed that during a thunderstorm, when lightning strikes, the heavens open and human souls descend into the wombs of their future mothers, to be born in due course in a new body. Here we see that, in the minds of ancient people, the identity between heavenly fire and earthly fire was absolute. Echoes of this ancient belief are recorded among the ancient Greeks in the myth that mushrooms spring up in the forest when lightning strikes. These mushrooms represent the souls of people punished for disrespecting the gods... These souls did not revere the gods, and as punishment for their sin, they descend not into their mother's womb, but directly into the womb of Mother Earth.

### ***MAGIC OF THE CLAN***

Our ancestors believed that thanks to the heavenly fire, as well as the fire hidden within all living creatures, all living things bear fruit and multiply. This was also reflected in ancient folk traditions.

As A.N. Afanasiev wrote, in those days when tradition in Russia dictated that the land should be ploughed and fertilised, peasants would never lend fire from their homes. They believed that whoever lent fire to a stranger would have a poor harvest. Conversely, whoever managed to beg for fire for themselves would have an excellent harvest. If burning embers were given to neighbours at all, it was on the condition that they be returned immediately. This was the ancient magic of fire, which was widespread throughout the ancient world.

The Bulgarians, when setting out into the fields to plough and sow, would scatter hot embers near their ox-drawn carts. In Russia, peasants have long passed all the grain intended for sowing through a blaze — through the smoke of burning straw. This was supposed to purify the grain of any corruption. They set the straw alight with embers taken from the stove.

In general, it should be noted that the happiness of all living in the house depended on the fire kindled in the stove or hearth. Even Nestor, recounting

the ancient way of life of the Slavs, wrote that relatives lived together in a single hut. The stove was not only a source of heat but also a symbol of family happiness. Children, upon getting married, would build a small outbuilding (a cold log cabin) attached to their parents' hut. However, there remained a single hearth for everyone. Shared meals and cooking together united the members of one large, extended family. Every family had its own ancestral patron, symbolised by the hearth. When the family grew so large that running a joint household became problematic, part of the extended family would break away from the family hearth and move to a new location, where a new dwelling was built and a separate hearth established. In doing so, embers from the old hearth were transferred to the new one. Sometimes a brick was taken from the foundation of the old hearth and laid in the foundation of the new one. This served as a symbol of ancestral continuity.

### ***THE POKER AND THE FIRE SCOOP***

To generalise to a certain extent, the way in which Slavic families split up bears some resemblance to the life of social insects. For example, a bee colony invariably exists until a certain point; but during swarming, it splits into two parts.

Among the Slavs, the magic of the clan was closely linked to the magic of fire. The Slavs believed that the fire kindled in the hearth ignited a flame of love and adoration, which spread to all members of the family living under one roof. Many ancient rituals find their explanation in this belief. Thus, when seeking a bride, the Slavs would turn to the family hearth as a clan deity and seek its permission to take the chosen bride from her family. According to a Bulgarian custom, upon entering the bride's house, the matchmaker scoops embers from the stove. And from this gesture, the purpose of his visit is understood. In Russia, when the matchmaker arrives at the bride's parents' house, the first thing she does—regardless of whether it is winter or summer—is to warm her hands by the stove, and only then does she begin her matchmaking. Evidently, this is the origin of the expression 'to warm one's hands'.

In Little Russia, when matchmaking negotiations are underway, the bride sits by the stove and begins to chip away at the clay. In doing so, she expresses her desire to get married. In the Chernigov Governorate, when the matchmakers arrive, the bride climbs onto the stove, and they beg her to come down. If she climbs down from the stove, she thereby expresses her readiness to leave her family home.

In the Kursk province, before the matchmaking begins, the groom's father and his chosen matchmaker tie a poker to a dustpan. This magical gesture is meant to ensure the success of the campaign. It is not difficult to see that the poker symbolises the male sexual organ, and the dustpan the female. It is a kind of *Linga* — the male sexual organ of Shiva, resting upon the female sexual organ of Parvati — *the yoni*. A.N. Afanasyev interprets this differently. He believes that the poker is a symbol of the lightning-bearing mace of the god Agni, whilst the poker brush is a symbol of the wind fanning the flames of a thunderstorm. This magical ritual is meant to kindle the fire of love. In the Tver Governorate, the day after the wedding, people in fancy dress parade through the village carrying a pomelo and a stove damper. Evidently, the symbolism remains the same.

#### **BADNYAK — AS SEXUAL MAGIC**

Among the Serbs, after the wedding ceremony, the bride enters her future home and makes her way to the hearth, takes a log that has been lit beforehand and shakes it so that sparks fly in all directions. After which the mother-in-law ties her up with her own belt. It is not hard to see that the sparks flying in all directions symbolise children and prosperity. A similar custom in Russia requires the newlywed, upon entering her husband's home, to throw her belt onto the stove.

It is no coincidence that there are many love spells recited before a stoked stove: 'As the wood burns hot, so may my young heart burn for me!'

To this day, there is a Serbian proverb: 'My happiness grows in the ashes!' Clearly, the meaning here is the same — the identification of the fire in the stove with the fire of love. In Little Russia, they say of happy people: 'He was born in the stove!' In the Arkhangelsk Governorate, at the end of

the wedding feast, guests are served porridge; when it has been eaten, the empty pot is thrown into the stove with the words: 'As many shards as there are young lads!'

In days gone by, the Slavs, like all Indo-Europeans, had a custom of offering sacrifices to fire, which was supposed to ensure prosperity in the home. In this context, the fire in the hearth was, in people's minds, inseparable from the heavenly fire. It is well known that at the winter solstice, the Serbs would light an oak log in their home hearth, which they called **a badnyak**. They would then scatter grains of wheat, flour and salt into the fire, pour in butter and milk, and throw in coins. Then, striking the burning log with a poker, they would say: 'As many sparks as there are, so many children, cows, goats, pigs, bees, happiness and good fortune!' The lighting of the badnyak is also known in Montenegro and among the Bulgarians. It is not difficult to see the mystical connection between the 'badnyak' and sexual magic. Among Czech peasant families, the custom of offering part of the feast to the fire persists to this day. The same custom exists among Hindus. The Istrian Slavs 'feed' the log lit on St John's Day by showering it with grains of wheat.

### ***SPIRITS AND DEMONS***

As Alexander Nikolaevich Afanasyev wrote in his book *\*The Tree of Life\**:

'The worship of the souls of departed ancestors was closely linked to the cult of the hearth. According to a belief common to all Aryan tribes, the souls of the dead were conceived as elemental beings—spirits moving through storm clouds like swiftly flashing lights (lightning) or blowing winds... These views, dating back to the deepest antiquity, explain why the souls of departed ancestors were identified by their descendants with the sacred element of the hearth fire, and why the 'domovoy'—the guardian of the hearth—was regarded as the forefather, the founder of the clan, and honoured with the name of a grandfather.'

And indeed, to this day there are popular beliefs that during a thunderstorm the spirits of the dead visit the living. The only thing that has changed is the attitude towards such spirits. For instance, in A.S. Pushkin's poem 'The Demons' it is written:

'...I see: spirits have  
gathered Amidst the  
whitening plains. Endless,  
hideous, In the moon's  
murky play, Various demons  
whirl about, Like leaves in  
November... How many  
there are! Where are they  
being driven? Why do they  
sing so plaintively?  
Are they burying a house spirit,  
Or are they giving a witch  
away in marriage? Clouds  
rush, clouds swirl; The  
moon, like a ghost,  
Illuminates the drifting  
snow; The sky is murky, the  
night is murky. Swarms  
upon swarms of demons  
rush Through boundless  
heights, With plaintive  
screeches and howls Tearing  
at my heart...'.  
'

If the opening lines state: '...I see: the spirits have gathered', then at the end the author echoes the conventional view of spirits travelling in the whirlwind—that they are demons. Thus, in a single verse, Pushkin presents two attitudes towards spirits—the traditional and the later one.

#### ***HEAVENLY FIRE AND THE Hearth OF THE FOREFATHERS***

In the aforementioned book by A.N. Afanasyev, it is stated:

‘Alongside this, the consciousness of the first human couple was, according to myth, attributed to the god of thunder: he called them into being (kindled the flame of life within them, breathed immortal life into them), bestowed upon them the power of fertility, and thus laid the foundation for the family, the clan, the tribe... In essence, both the myth of the origin of fire and the legend of the beginning of the human race were identical: the god of thunder (Agni) sent lightning from the sky, kindled a fire on earth with it, and established the first hearth: in that very lightning-like flame, he brought down to earth the soul of the first man, settled him by the hearth, and established the family union, the household, and the sacrificial rite. The significance of the sacred fire and the head of the household within the family, the clan, and under the roof of the ancestral home was so equivalent that the elevation of the forefathers to the household Penates (guardian deities) was the most necessary and natural result of human moral convictions... The title of priest was equally bestowed upon both the fire and the progenitor, who was obliged to serve at the altar. Upon dying, the ancestors did not abandon their descendants entirely, nor did they sever ties with them completely; they merely shed their physical forms; joining the elemental spirits, they continued, as guardian spirits, to watch over their descendants invisibly, to safeguard their interests and to assist them in the trials of life.”

Afanasyev goes on to illustrate his point. He writes that among the common people it is customary to refer to the deceased as ‘parents’, and this term is used even when speaking of deceased children. In the Nizhny Novgorod Governorate, the peasants are convinced that, in return for the memorial services held in their honour, the deceased bestow upon their relatives’ homes everlasting prosperity. In the Penza and Saratov provinces, the Mordovian population observes a significant ritual: relatives bring the deceased eggs, butter and money, saying: ‘Here you are, Semyon (the deceased’s name), take this! Martha (the mistress) has brought this for you; look after her livestock and bread; when I am reaping, feed the chickens and watch over the house.” In this way, the same duties were assigned to the deceased as those attributed to the house spirit.

## THE HOUSE SPIRIT

A.N. Afanasyev writes:

‘Belarusians call the dead dzedy, Poles — dzady; and in the mountains of Galicia they speak of dedky dwelling by the family hearth (on the stove) as house spirits who take part in the household. Until the 14th century, the Czechs understood the terms ‘*dedy*’ and ‘*dedky*’ to refer to household deities, and even now many still believe that ‘*didky*’ protect the fields, guard the livestock, and assist with hunting and fishing; if the agreement with them is broken, they become angry and cause a commotion in the house. According to Czech belief, the deceased master, immediately after the funeral, walks around his house at night and watches over it carefully to ensure that no misfortune befalls his heirs. For the Montenegrins, vedogoni are not only the souls of the departed, but also household spirits who protect the homes and property of their blood relatives from attacks by thieves and foreign vedogoni...

The house spirit was recognised as the true inhabitant of the house and its supreme ruler. That is why in Russia the house spirit is directly called ‘master’ or ‘mistress’, and there is even a belief that the house spirit is ‘the spitting image of the master of the house’ — so much does he resemble him! Indeed, the house spirit is the ideal master. He notices every little detail, toils tirelessly and looks after everything, helping a worker here, rectifying his mistake there... The house spirit shares in both the family’s joy and its sorrow. When a member of the household dies, he howls at night; he forewarns of the master’s own death with heavy sighs and weeping. Before a plague, fire or war, the house spirits leave the village and howl in the pastures. If unexpected trouble is coming, the house spirit announces its approach with knocking, night-time rides that exhaust the horses, and orders to the guard dogs

to dig in the middle of the courtyard. Wishing to warn a sleeping master of some misfortune—for example, the outbreak of a fire caused by a thief who has crept into the courtyard—the house spirit pushes him and wakes him up.”

### ***THE HOUSE SPIRIT LIKE A MISCHIEVOUS CHILD***

It may be assumed that the attitude towards the house spirit in peasant society, as described by the scholar, has changed significantly under the influence of Christianity. The house spirit appears before us not as a fearsome guardian of the clan and the family hearth, but as a benevolent spirit, a sort of servant to the living members of his household. The house spirit is inclined to work, yet at the same time displays a certain childishness and frivolity. Thus, whilst being thrifty and shrewd, the house spirit does not consider it a sin to steal fodder from other people’s granaries and haylofts for his own livestock. The Domovoy sees everything through the eyes of a ‘hard-working peasant’, looking after the livestock — all that is true. Yet at the same time, he indulges in strange pranks more typical of restless and foolish children. This is how A.N. Afanasyev describes it:

‘So, in one house he used to beat the cats, throwing whatever came to hand at them. Once he grabbed a cat and flung it to the ground, and the old woman, in the meantime, gave him a piece of her mind: “Why are you throwing it? Is this how a householder behaves? We cannot live without a cat; is that any sort of householder?” From that time on, the house spirit stopped touching the cats.’

Perhaps the house spirit’s pranks characterise him as a future child whose fate is already sealed. He is destined to be born into his own family.

When the house spirit is angered by something, he begins to smash crockery and hurl objects about. Modern people are familiar with this behaviour of the house spirit under the name ‘barabashka’. Of course, the ‘barabashka’ bears little resemblance to the pagan guardian patriarch. Evidently, not without the influence of the new religion—Christianity—the domovoy came to be regarded as a rogue, a jester, a troublemaker and a mischief-maker—as he

in some regions of Russia. These names are also applied to the devil. It should also be noted that the devil, like the domovoy, is traditionally associated with the element of fire. It is no coincidence that, in a simplified conception of the underworld, devils fry sinners in frying pans and boil them in cauldrons. It is thought that these cauldrons and frying pans were once metaphors for the domestic hearth, and that the devils themselves were not so hopelessly hideous.

### ***THE DEITY OF THE CLAN***

According to Nestor, the pagan Slavs cremated their dead, collected their ashes in vessels and placed them ‘on a post by the paths’, that is, they placed urns containing the ashes on boundary posts marking the boundaries of the clan’s estate. These boundary posts were called **‘termy’** and took the form of miniature ‘terem’ huts on a wooden base. (Evidently, this is the origin of **the** words **‘terem’**, **‘tyurma’** [**prison**], and so on.) To erect a ‘term’, a pit was dug; hot coals were placed in it, honey and oil were poured in, and grains of bread, fruit and a loaf of bread were thrown in. Over time, such posts evolved into a miniature necropolis and were revered as the embodiment of the clan’s deity, which protected the settlement. The spirits of deceased relatives also served as a reliable defence and always stood guard over the interests of the family and the clan.

A.N. Afanasiev believes that the clan guardian — the patriarch and founder of the clan — found his embodiment in the ancient Slavic deity Chur.

It is quite curious that in Sanskrit there is a verb ‘chur’ — it means to burn. This is further evidence of the former Indo-European unity.

Words in the Russian language such as **‘churka’**, **‘churban’** and **‘churbak’** are derived from the name of the clan’s own deity, Chur. These words refer to a tree stump or a thick log. Such a log is typically used to light a fire in the stove. Evidently, in times gone by, a statue of Chur stood on the outskirts, at a crossroads, at the entrance and exit to the settlement. This statue required fiery sacrifices. It was here, during the New Year celebrations—which in Russia, prior to the reform

, was celebrated in March, the master of the house would drive the sacrificial animal. It was here that ‘the cauldrons bubbled away’, in which the meat of this animal was cooked. Evidently, it was also here, in the immediate vicinity of the wooden statue of Chur, that the villagers cremated the dead, lighting a funeral pyre.

Echoes of these memorial rites can still be found here and there in the Russian hinterland to this day.

### **HOW TO WARM THE DEAD**

To this day, there is a custom known as ‘warming the dead’. On a specific day, considered auspicious for commemorating the deceased, a bonfire is lit on the outskirts of the village, in which old clothes and rags are burned. Sometimes potatoes are roasted and a simple soup is cooked over this fire. It is believed that relatives who have died that year stand in an invisible circle alongside the living and the children by the fire, gazing at the flames, whilst their souls ‘warm themselves’ by the familiar fire. Before the Revolution, in the Tambov Governorate, the head of the household would wake up early in the morning on the day of remembrance and set off for the vegetable garden, taking with him a pot of embers and a bundle of straw. There, standing by the wattle fence, he would bow three times towards the East, light the straw and say: ‘O holy flame and grey smoke, rise up to the heavens, bow to my parents, and tell them how we all live here.’

As A.N. Afanasiev wrote, our ancestors believed that the clan deity was Chur (churban), who was revered as the embodiment of fire (Agni). This is the origin of the common expression ‘lamb of God’. Our ancestors believed that a living sacred fire, kindled by friction, was hidden within the wooden statue of Chur. Furthermore, this statue served as a boundary marking the villagers’ lands. This is reflected in common folk expressions such as: ‘Chur on me!’, ‘Chur, our place is sacred!’, as well as in the adverb **‘cherezchur’** — ‘Even a horse won’t step over the line’.

A.N. Afanasiev believes that the verb **‘churatsya’** means not only ‘to swear by Chur’, but also ‘to mark out’ — ‘to rush headlong’. In days gone by, ‘marking out’ served a ritual function.

For example, in order to unearth a treasure, one had to mark out the site of the future excavation with a burning ember and say: ‘Chur, our place is sacred!’. It was believed that in this case, Chur, the guardian deity of the clan, would help to unearth the enchanted treasure. Exclamations such as ‘Chur me!’ and ‘Chur together, not alone!’ show just how deeply the practice of invoking Chur has become ingrained in the popular consciousness. Another form of the word ‘chur’ is ‘shchur’. This is clearly evident in the name of the ancestor **‘pra-shchur’**. The pra-shur is precisely the one who founded the clan. The words **‘to forgive’ and ‘to bid farewell’** are evidently also linked to the word pra-shur. It is no coincidence that the religious calendar includes a day known as ‘Forgiveness Sunday’. On this day, the dead are commemorated.

#### ***CHUR IS NOT LIKE THE DEVIL***

It may be surmised that the proper name ‘Chur’ is in some way connected with the word ‘chert’, which has acquired a negative connotation. Perhaps the soot-stained Slavic idol appeared ‘black’ to the early Christians **‘black’**, and this is where the name for the evil spirit — ‘chert’ — comes from. Or perhaps the word ‘chert’ derives from the words **‘cherta’ (line), ‘chertit’ (to draw a line), ‘to outline’**. The idol of Chur invisibly separated the clan’s domain from another hostile world. It served as that boundary line along which the division between ‘us’ and ‘them’ took place.

The significance of the clan deity Chura is best illustrated by the children’s game ‘the magic stick’. ‘Paly-vry!’ the children shout, touching the ‘sacred’ stick. In doing so, they seem to cling to the patriarch-protector Chur, asking him for protection and finding it. The verb **‘to rescue’** is evidently also derived from the noun Chur. If children play ‘rescue’, then our distant ancestors sincerely believed that Chur cared for them, that he would come to their aid in any difficult situation; all they had to do was cling to his idol with supplication and hope, uttering the cherished words: ‘Chur me!’.

Undoubtedly, much of this seems archaic to us today. Yet there are things that are perfectly explainable from the standpoint of common sense. The progenitor of the Chur lineage was the embodiment of the first human, who bestowed

life to subsequent generations. We inherit not only our biological bodies, but also the cultural traditions of our forebears. When we turn in prayer to the founding patriarch of the clan, we hope that he will not abandon us in times of trouble and will share in our happiness... For the patriarch's soul is as immortal as our own. At least, that was the view held by our ancestors.

In ancient times, it was forbidden to show disrespect to Churu, let alone damage his statue. The souls of such people were subjected to a clan curse for this; and, deprived of shelter and protection, they were forced to roam the fields and villages as a wandering flame.

### ***THE WHITE-BURNING STONE OF ALATYR***

Whilst the Chur, erected in the immediate vicinity of the village, served to protect it, a boundary stone performed a similar protective role at a distance from the village. It was forbidden to touch this stone, for doing so would result in a change to the land boundaries. Those who committed such acts were doomed to wander between heaven and earth after death, striving in vain to find a place of refuge.

If the Chur personified the hearth fire kindled by rubbing dry wood, the stone symbolised the heavenly fire. This is clearly evident in the fairy-tale motif of comparing the Alatyr Stone with the bright spring sun. Sometimes, in Russian incantations, the epithet used is not 'Alatyr stone' but 'kip-stone', meaning a stone that boils. During ritual sacrifices, stones were heated in a fire and cauldrons and pots were placed upon them. Literally, the contents of these cauldrons and pots boiled upon contact with these stones. Perhaps this is where the expression 'kip-stone' originated. Here is how the kip-stone, or 'white-burning stone', is described in one incantation: 'On the sea, on the ocean, on the island of Buyan lies the white-burning stone-alatyr; upon that stone sits a red maiden'. The red maiden is the morning dawn. She 'sews up bloody wounds... Whoever devours the alatyr stone will overcome my spell'. In this context, the island of Buyan serves as a metaphor for the spring sky. In spring, 'violent winds' blow. Our ancestors believed that on the island of Buyan

lived the mighty deities of wind, storm and whirlwind. As Afanasyev put it: 'On the island of Buyan lies a thunderous serpent, the storm-bird nests, and lightning-bees swarm, sending the honeyed moisture of rain down to the earth'. Thus, ritual objects — boundary stones and makeshift altars by the roadsides, near which sacrifices were made — were, in the minds of ancient people, of a fiery nature, akin to the spring sun. No wonder a Russian riddle asks: 'What grows without roots?' The answer is: 'A white, flammable stone'.

### ***HOW SHEEP TURN INTO STONES***

For centuries, stones have been regarded as petrified creatures inhabited by good or evil spirits. This is evidenced by the practice of ritual sacrifices. For instance, on one of the islands in Lake Ladoga, a huge 'Horse-stone' was particularly revered. According to local beliefs, it was inhabited by spirits who protected the herds grazing on the island. Medieval chronicles reveal that as late as the 15th century, a horse was sacrificed to the Horse-Stone every year. It was believed that this horse served as food for the spirits of the stone.

It is known that near Tula there lies a stone around which, even before the revolution, an annual ritual of circling was performed. This served as a reliable protection against livestock disease.

The magic of stones is widely known in folk tradition. For instance, to prevent a headache, one had to press one's head against a stone at the first clap of thunder... In Polesie, on Maundy Thursday at sunrise, people would jump three times onto a single stone to ensure good health for the whole year.

Stones were also used in farming. For instance, when planting cabbages in a bed, a large round stone was placed there. Peasants believed that the heads would grow as dense and large as this stone... To prevent wild animals from harming grazing livestock, stones brought from three different pastures were buried in the ground near the pasture. As they did so, the peasants would say: 'These stones are for the wolf's teeth.' And indeed, it sometimes happened that wolves or bears would come out to the edge of the forest, look

at the grazing goats, sheep and cows, and would retreat back into the forest. According to the belief, the beasts saw stones instead of livestock.

***‘GRANDFATHER’S’ BELONGINGS HIDDEN UNDER THE  
SACRED STONE***

The boundary stone has long been perceived as an insurmountable barrier. It was forbidden to step over it. This notion found expression in some folk tales. Thus, a mighty warrior’s horse, returning from the far-off kingdom, touches a magic stone with its hoof and immediately turns to stone along with its rider.

In fairy tales, the stone becomes a metaphor for an obstacle. For instance, Ivan Tsarevich, fleeing from his pursuers, throws a magical stone over his shoulder, and in an instant mountains rise up behind him, separating him from his pursuers. In fairy-tale plots, the hero often encounters various characters sitting on stones. These include the Old Man of the Forest, the Red Maiden, the Fiery Maidens, and serpents, as well as Christian saints and prophets.

A treasure is often hidden beneath a stone, where one finds all manner of magical objects: a tablecloth that sets itself, an invisibility cap, and boots that make one run fast. All these magical objects turn out to be ‘Grandfather’s’.

However, one must not touch the stone or move it from its place without permission. Here is how one North Russian folktale tells the story: a farmer took a large stone from the field to build a barn, broke it into pieces, and laid them in the foundations. Afterwards, an old man appeared to him in a dream and ordered him to remove the stone fragments from the foundations and return them to their original place. The farmer did not believe such a dream. However, his livestock began to die in the barn. The farmer had to drag the stone fragments out and carry them back to the spot where the stone had stood. From that day on, the livestock stopped dying.

In folk epics, there is a motif of people who have been turned to stone. To return to human form, their descendants must perform a specific ritual near the stone.

Our ancestors believed that a life-giving fire was contained within the sacred stone. Thus, in one fairy tale, the fiery serpent says to Ivan Tsarevich: ‘There is a stone on the island of Buyan, and within that stone is a hare, and within that hare is a duck, and within that duck is a frog, and within that frog is a pebble: that is my death!’. As we can see, here the fiery serpent is identical to another folk character — Koschei the Deathless.

### ***THE SLEEPING ARMY***

To deprive the hero of his strength, his sworn enemy turns him into a stone statue — such is, for example, the plot concerning the bogatyr Mikhail Potyka. When Mikhail Potyka comes to life after the appointed time, he utters the sacramental phrase: ‘How long I have slept!’ Plots featuring a princess in a deep, unbroken sleep and sleeping heroes are widespread in folk epics.

Indo-European mythology is replete with similar tales. Thus, Indra, the lord of spring storms, enchanted by demons, falls asleep for several winter months in his castle high above the clouds. And only upon awakening from his long slumber to the sound of Vedic hymns does he destroy the seven cities of the demon of winter with his fiery arrows and free from captivity the herds of heavenly cows and cloud maidens, who water the earth with living water. The seven cities are a perfectly understandable metaphor for the seven months of winter.

Russian fairy tales tell of how a beloved beauty lost her betrothed and found him, kidnapped by a rival, plunged into a deep, dreamless sleep. Only on the third night does she awaken her fiancé. Three nights and three days are a metaphor for the three months of winter — a time of blizzards and cold, when all of Russia’s nature sleeps, covered by a white shroud.

A.N. Afanasyev cites in his book an ancient Czech legend which tells of knights, once fallen in battle, resting on Mount Blaník, four miles from Tábor. Some sleep on stone benches, leaning forward, resting on their swords; others sit upright in the saddle, on their saddled, sleeping horses.

The Czechs believe that every year on St John's Day, Mount Blaník opens up and the knights ride out to water their horses. There is an ancient legend among the Czechs that this ancient army will sleep until an evil enemy attacks Prague. He will raze Prague to the ground. Then the ancient pond near Blaník will fill with blood, and the knights will emerge from the mountain to destroy the enemy...

### ***HALF-MEN GUARD THE PEACE OF THE GIANTS***

According to Afanasyev, similar myths exist in Russia as well. It is said among the people that once upon a time, an ataman named Stenka Razin roamed the banks of the Volga with his band of outlaws. In the Razinsky Bugs, the famous bandit hid his plundered riches in deep cellars, behind iron doors. And he cast a spell upon this wealth. Stenka Razin himself and his band are alive, and sleep in one of the cellars. Their peace is guarded by fabulous creatures — half-men with one eye, one arm and one leg. To move from one place to another, they must join together in pairs, and then they run with astonishing speed... These people do not reproduce through birth, but fashion their own kind from iron. And only smoke and stench rise from their underground forge. In the Tomsk Governorate, these mythical people were called polovayniki. Their origin was attributed to the devil, with whom Stenka Razin had made a pact.

These legends are somewhat reminiscent of the legend of Shambhala, where giants lie asleep. And they are merely awaiting the appointed time to awaken and reveal themselves to the world as its true rulers. One Tibetan legend states that the giants' rest is guarded by people made of gold — golden idols that spring into action and strike uninvited guests without fail with their weapons...

A chronicle recorded by the Novgorodian Gyuraty Rogovich bears some resemblance to this Tibetan legend. It tells of a mighty warrior named Alexander the Great who once lived in the world. He drove his enemies to the ends of the earth. And when he reached the ends of the earth, he was astonished to find people living there: 'one had one eye, another three; one had one leg, another three; and they ran as fast as an arrow flies from a bow.' The name

of these peoples was Gog and Magog. Alexander the Great drove them into one mountain and blocked it with another mountain. And to this day, howls and cries can be heard from that mountain. 'These Gog and Magog are still alive and will emerge from the mountain just before the end of the world.'

Similar myths are found among the ancient Greeks. These are myths about one-eyed giants—the Cyclopes—living in caves. Myths about half-people are recounted by Plato. These people served as 'blanks' for the gods in the creation of two-legged and two-armed humans.

## **Chapter 8. THE TERRIFYING SECRET OF THE ANCIENT CASTLE**

This chapter explores the paradoxes of ancient legends and the highly peculiar and idiosyncratic interpretations placed upon them by Nazi occultists; it examines how the sacred spear failed to pierce the Holy Grail, despite the best efforts of the SS mystics; it tells of a ghost who fled to Tibet; the triumph and downfall of the 'Reichsführer-SS'; the ring and dagger for those initiated into the 'new religion'; the living and dead head; about Hitler as an opponent of Christianity; about the mystic Otto Rane; about the turning point in history seven hundred years on, and about the inglorious Surrender with which this whole story ended; and also about the sleeping giants of Lobsang Rampa; about the crystal coffin and the talking head of Odin.

### ***NEW MYTHS IN THE OLD STYLE***

Even the Romans, when laying the foundations of a city, would harness oxen and plough a deep furrow around the future city. At the site of the future gates, they would lift the plough. Anyone who did not enter through the gates but climbed over the wall was to be subjected to severe punishment — the death penalty — for thereby violating the sanctity of the city's boundaries. It was believed that the city wall was not merely a barrier, but a boundary over which the spirits of the ancestors watched, warding off hostile spirits and evil men.

Medieval castles in Europe were built on the same principle; it was believed that spirits dwelled near their walls, warding off the enemy. Thus, in Westphalia, south of the town of Paderborn, stands the mysterious Wewelsburg Castle. An ancient Westphalian legend about the 'Battle of the White Birch' held that it was precisely at the walls of this castle that the final great battle between the forces of the West and the hordes of the East — the 'new Huns' — would take place. This battle would become a symbol of Europe's rebirth.

The mystically inclined leaders of the Third Reich took this legend as a blueprint for action. In order to prevent the impending devastation of Europe by the 'hordes of the East' and to repel the invasion of the 'conquerors' as effectively as possible, it was decided to rebuild the ancient castle, giving it a new appearance. The castle's layout resembles the tip of a spear. It was decided to surround the castle with religious structures resembling a chalice and the disc of the sun. The spearhead and the chalice were essential attributes of the medieval myth of the Holy Grail. It was believed that, following its reconstruction, the castle would become the very barrier in the path of 'hordes of the East', forcing them to flee.

Among other things, in the northern round tower, which served as a sort of spearhead for a giant spear, a domed chamber was built with a stone circle at its centre. This circle reproduced an ancient Indo-European symbol — the 'Black Sun'. It represented a 'wheel pierced by 12 glowing bolts of lightning'. All these esoteric and architectural alterations were intended to 'mobilise an army of Aryan warriors'. It was envisaged that the priests of the new cult from the 'Order of the New Templars' (a mystical organisation created by the SS) would periodically establish contact with the 'Aryan host' from the afterlife and channel its might and power to achieve the 'Great Victory'. The plan was to consolidate the efforts of the living and the dead during a magical ritual in order to achieve the Great Victory. Then an ancient legend would be fulfilled and Wewelsburg would become the new Mecca of the Third Reich. It would become the occult centre of the world.

### ***THE SPEAR DID NOT STRIKE THE HOLY GRAIL***

The mystery surrounding the enigmatic castle never fully materialised; the 'sun-chalice' framing Wewelsburg Castle was never completed, and Soviet troops reached Berlin unscathed. One might solemnly remark in this regard that the beauty of ancient prophecies lies in the fact that they have a habit of coming true. The rebirth of Europe began precisely after the war. Some controversial German historians attribute the project's failure to the fact that

Himmler — the head of the SS — had lost faith in the mystical abilities of Karl Maria Willigut. It was Willigut who had been entrusted with overseeing the work at the castle. The occultist, having fallen out of favour, was dismissed from the SS on Himmler's personal orders.

Here and there, one may come across references to work being carried out at the Wewelsburg complex aimed at overcoming the passage of time, obtaining the elixir of immortality and creating the instruments of unlimited power. Such a wide range of aims and objectives is impressive... However 'great and terrible' the leaders of the Third Reich may have considered themselves, achieving these goals was clearly beyond their capabilities. To enhance his personal power, the project leader Willigut visited numerous ancient burial sites where the remains of German kings and military commanders lay. At these graves, he performed complex occult rituals, attempting to imbue himself with the souls of the dead and increase his mystical potential. We know full well how all these attempts ended: with the complete rout of the Nazi forces.

In 1946, Himmler's 'personal magician', Willigut, died of depression and old age. Some of his former friends believed that Willigut had resorted to ritual suicide and that he had managed to 'step through the gates of death'.

#### ***'TO TIBET, TO MY KINGDOM!' — REPLIED THE GHOST***

According to eyewitnesses, Willigut's rebellious spirit continued to haunt the walls of Wewelsburg for a long time. He was allegedly seen near the castle long after the war. One eyewitness recalls a strange incident that happened to him near the castle in 1989. His car, in which he was driving to Wewelsburg at midnight, was involved in a very strange accident — it suddenly stopped and caught fire. The eyewitness walked to the castle, leaving his car to burn. At one of the crossroads, he encountered a strange black figure riding a white horse, and asked the rider where he was riding to at such a late hour. 'To Tibet, to my kingdom!' was the reply. When the eyewitness was shown a photo album

devoted to the history of Wewelsburg, he immediately recognised his nocturnal companion in several of the photographs. It was Willigut...

Of course, one can take different views on such accounts. But many local residents speak of mysterious lights flaring up at night near the castle walls, and of the strange clamour of battle that can be heard at certain times of the day. Some mystically inclined villagers believe that these are the souls of German soldiers and officers from an elite SS unit, who perished in that unjust war, returning at night to the walls of the ancient building... in the hope of turning back the course of history. But that is impossible...

Wewelsburg Castle was by no means the only 'place of power' where, according to the leaders of the Thousand-Year Reich, the boundary between worlds lay. Such places were identified by the Nazis in Germany, Scandinavia, Switzerland, Austria, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Ukraine, and so on.

### ***THE TRIUMPH AND FALL OF HIMMLER***

The 'leaders' of the Reich practised the occult ritual of seeking help from the 'leaders' of other eras. Some high-ranking officials of the Reich considered themselves to be the reincarnations of German kings and historical figures. For instance, Himmler was convinced that he was the reincarnation of King Henry I (the Bird Catcher), so named because of his fondness for women...

This king was the founder of the Saxon dynasty of kings. He succeeded in uniting Germany and defeated the combined army of the Slavs. The reign of Henry I (the Fowl-Catcher) went down in history as the era of the First Reich, beginning in May 919, when Henry became sovereign of the German Kingdom.

According to Himmler's biographers and critics, he joined the 'Artamans' youth movement whilst still in his youth. As early as 1924, members of this group settled on an estate in Saxony to put the idea of self-sufficiency into practice. The Artamans armed themselves in order to prevail in the impending battle against the Slavs. The names of some members of this movement later

became infamous. For instance, Rudolf Höss became commandant of the Auschwitz death camp, whilst the racist agrarian Richard Walter Darré went on to head the SS Main Office for Race and Resettlement. Himmler himself, at the age of 28, was appointed head of the SS and awarded the highest rank—Reichsführer-SS. He held this position for seventeen years, right up until the fall of the Third Reich.

Whilst the Allies and the Russians were liberating Germany from the Hitlerite plague, Himmler set off across Allied-occupied territory, dressed in a corporal's greatcoat, to Heinrich's (the Bird Catcher's) grave. Evidently, he believed he would be able to perform an occult ritual at this grave that would miraculously alter the course of the war. He never made it to the grave. After three days of wandering, he was arrested by a British patrol and, during interrogation, crushed a vial of poison.

### ***'A FARMER IN HIS OWN FIELD...'***

Initially, Himmler had envisaged establishing a secret SS society solely within Germany, but the programme was subsequently expanded to include the Reich's expansion eastwards.

"The farmer in his own field," wrote the SS chief, "represents the foundation of the strength and character of the German people." Such a seemingly innocent formulation, however, justified the superiority of the German race. Himmler chose the era of the First Reich as a model for creating his 'peasant utopia'.

From the very beginning, the SS regiments were an elite organisation. Himmler reinstated the old regimental names from the days of the Kaiser's Reich:

'Totenkopf', 'Liebesbanner', 'Reich'. The Reichsführer-SS wrote that, just as the 'Totenkopf' had served Frederick the Great and the rescuers of the King of Bavaria, the new SS regiments would serve the Third Reich in its hour of greatest need.

The term 'Totenkopf' itself, it turns out, is imbued with mythological significance, which we shall discuss a little later.

The hierarchical structure of the SS was modelled on the Jesuit Order, which had in its time become the religious wing of the Spanish Empire. The founder of this order was Ignatius Loyola (1491–1566).

Himmler reproduced the hierarchy of the Jesuit Order almost verbatim. Ordinary SS members corresponded to simple Jesuit monks. The SS elite — members of the ‘Black Order’ — corresponded the ‘confessors’—Jesuits who had taken special vows. The stages of initiation that SS candidates underwent were ritualised, as in any closed religious society.

### ***THE LORD OF THE RINGS***

There were several insignia within Himmler’s Order. Perhaps the best known was a silver signet ring bearing the image of a ‘skull’. The ring was made from a silver disc, whilst the skull was fashioned from a separate piece of silver and soldered onto the top, concealing the seam. Inside each ring there was an engraving beginning with the words: ‘To my dear...’ and ending with the owner’s surname, the date of presentation and a facsimile of Himmler’s signature. The ring was worn on the ring finger of the left hand.

This insignia was awarded to ‘distinguished’ members of the SS. However, the award procedure was subsequently simplified, and by the end of the war almost all SS officers possessed such a badge. It was believed that this ring, depicting a ‘Death’s Head’, a swastika and runes, had a ritual connection with Wewelsburg Castle. Upon an officer’s death, the ring was to be returned to the castle, where it was to be kept for all eternity. This ritual symbolised that the souls of the fallen would, from the ‘Realm of the Dead’, help their living comrades in the Order to achieve complete victory. On 17 October 1944, Himmler ordered the production of the rings to be halted until the end of the war. In the spring of 1945, he ordered that all the rings stored at Wewelsburg be buried under a rockfall, for which a controlled explosion was carried out. The rings have not yet been found.

Another sign of membership of the secret society was the dagger, which served as the insignia of an SS corps leader. Unlike the ring, the dagger was presented personally by Himmler right up until the end of the war. The dagger symbolised personal devotion and loyalty to the Reichsführer-SS and the ‘common cause’.

### ***‘THE 13 INITIATES’***

Among other things, the SS had an inner elite within the elite. This was a group of administrators comprising 13 Obergruppenführers, who were regarded as Himmler’s disciples. Walter Schellenberg wrote of the activities of this SS leadership:

“Wevelsburg Castle was adapted to serve as a kind of SS monastery. Every year, the Order’s chapter would gather there. Each member had their own chair with an engraved silver nameplate, and each was required to devote themselves to spiritual exercises aimed primarily at mental concentration.”

In the centre of the room stood Himmler’s round oak table — a symbol of Arthur’s Round Table. Thirteen chairs, as described by Schellenberg, were arranged around this table. Each of the ‘Knights of the Round Table’ had his own apartment in Wewelsburg, decorated in a heroic Old Germanic style.

Directly beneath the great hall was a chamber known as the ‘Realm of the Dead’. It was a crypt. In the event of the death of one of Himmler’s disciples, his remains were to be cremated in a special stone basin standing in the centre of the crypt, and the ashes placed in a special urn and set in a special niche. There were thirteen such urns and niches in total. Four ventilation openings were positioned so that the smoke from the burning body could rise unhindered above the castle... In this crypt,

a place of honour in which the remains of Germany's supreme leader, Adolf Hitler, were to be kept.

The entire layout of the crypt was modelled on the Jesuits' 'Royal Pantheon' at the El Escorial monastery near Madrid (Spain).

### ***THE LEGEND OF KING ARTHUR***

Himmler was fascinated by the rituals of the Teutonic Knights, and the legends of King Arthur seemed to have materialised at Wewelsburg Castle. Plans for the area around the castle, dating from 1940–1942, envisaged the relocation of the surrounding villages a considerable distance away. In their place, it was planned to construct an architectural complex, an entire mystical city —

the 'SS Vatican', which was to be completed by 1960. This city was to become the centre of the 'thousand-year Great German Reich' and the centre of the world.

Clearly, Himmler intended to accomplish what King Arthur had failed to do. Legends about this epic figure refer us to Celtic tales of the ruler of the world and the fatal inevitability of his kingdom's downfall.

According to ancient legend, Arthur established his rule over Britain by managing to draw a miraculous sword from beneath a stone lying on an altar — one of the sacred talismans of the Irish tribes. Thanks to his power, he established his residence in Carlion, marked by all the symbols of the centre of the world. In King Arthur's palace stands a round table, around which the king's finest knights sit. At the centre of the banquet hall is a magical cauldron, obtained by Arthur during his journey to Annon (the underworld). Let us recall that for the Indo-Europeans, the cauldron was a symbol of the hearth

— the sacred embodiment of the ancestral fire associated with ancestor worship. According to Celtic legends, the head of Bran—a mythological Celtic hero—rests in this cauldron; in another version of the myth, it is the head of Annon, king of the underworld. This head miraculously remains alive after the hero's death. It is a kind of

talisman, guarding the centre of the world against enemy invasions and various calamities. In Celtic legends, the warriors' feast is called 'the hospitality of the Noble Head'.

### ***THE KNIGHTS OF THE ROUND TABLE***

The knights and Arthur himself perform numerous feats in their quest to find the Holy Grail, which is probably understood to be the head of the king of the underworld. When they finally find the coveted head, the fairy-tale kingdom suffers an unexpected defeat at the hands of its enemies. Several Knights of the Round Table manage to escape from the besieged castle and carry the Holy Grail to safety. Arthur himself, mortally wounded, is transported by the goddess of death, Morrigan, to the island of Avalon, where he lies, having fallen into a deep sleep, in the goddess of death's marvellous palace atop a mountain.

As we can see, the myth offers plenty of scope for the imagination. Pagan and Christian beliefs are woven together in it in a remarkable way. The name of the Irish goddess of death, Morrigan, bears a striking resemblance to that of the Slavic goddess of death, Mara. The name of the island of Avalon sounds similar to the Irish realm of the dead — Annon. Personally, I associate this name with such time-honoured proper names as Apollo, Babylon and others. It seems to me that this is more than just a coincidence. The connection here may be more substantial than it appears at first glance. Apollo was originally a seasonal god of the Greeks, who died and was resurrected. He undertakes annual migrations in a chariot drawn by swans. Babylon is not only the name of a country and a city on the map, but also a symbol of an earthly paradise. Perhaps, in ways unknown to us, the linguistic connection between these words corresponds to a semantic one?

### ***THE LIVING HEAD***

It is quite interesting that the myth of the Grail underwent a significant change under the influence of Christianity. The 'living head' became dead. In Western European medieval legends, the 'Holy Grail' is understood to be the cup containing the blood of Jesus Christ, which was collected by Joseph of Arimathea, who took the body of the crucified Saviour down from the cross. According to other, rarer versions, the Grail is a silver platter bearing the bloodstained head of John the Baptist. Two other magical objects are also inextricably linked to the Grail: the spear with which a Roman soldier once pierced the body of the crucified Christ, and King David's treasured sword, which, according to biblical tradition, was destined for the virgin king.

As we can see, all three attributes—the sacred spear, the cup and the living-dead head—are present in Nazi symbolism.

The living head, as we well know, features in Russian folk tales. Various epic heroes encounter it and engage in single combat with it. This head belongs to a mythical giant who perished in ancient times.

It is possible that the image of the dead head arose under the influence of Christianity. The pagan prototype was different — the head was alive... It was through this living head that a connection with the other world was established. Indeed, the Christianised image of the Holy Grail also grants its possessors a connection with the Living God — Jesus Christ... At the very origin of this myth, it seems, the story was about a certain head of an ancestor, a patriarch, who gives sound advice and guides the hero's actions. This patriarchal ancestor has not died; he is merely without a body.

### ***THE DEAD HEAD***

Undoubtedly, Himmler drew upon later versions of the myth, infusing it with his own content. In his interpretation, the sleeping King Arthur appeared in the guise of Heinrich the Bird-Catcher. I cannot say for certain, but it seems that the 'Dead Head' in the Nazis' interpretation is precisely the head of this German king. To be convinced of this, one need only look at the engraving of Heinrich the Bird-Catcher's head in a royal crown,

created by a court artist during the Third Reich. It is worth recalling that Himmler constantly emphasised the continuity between the Third Reich and the Thousand-Year Reich. This was the case during his speech in 1936 at Quedlinburg Cathedral, where the body of King Heinrich the Bird-Catcher was buried. This speech was timed to coincide with the millennium of the king's death. Himmler's speech was even titled: 'Heinrich the Bird-Catcher'. According to an eyewitness, Himmler "called on the Germans to emulate the valiant deeds of the archetypal Führer"; at the same time, Himmler constantly launched attacks on Christianity and the 'orderly' Roman world... 'The East must be subjugated,' said Himmler. Accompanied by standard-bearers and officials, Himmler visited the king's ancestral home — Dankwarderode Castle, which, according to legend, had remained untouched since the day of the king's death. As Dr Alquen, one of the participants in that Nazi ceremony, wrote: 'We immediately sensed the king's presence amongst us, there in his castle...' Then, at midnight, Himmler went alone to the crypt of Quedlinburg Cathedral to commune with the spirit of the first Kaiser.

A year later, on 2 July 1937, Himmler solemnly reburied the king's remains in the same cathedral. Until the fall of the Third Reich, Himmler visited this burial site at midnight on every subsequent anniversary. The cathedral itself was 'cleansed' of Christian symbols; statues and ornaments were removed, and the burial site came to be guarded by an SS honour guard. Communicating with the 'Dead Head' did not do Himmler any good. Evidently, it is always better to communicate with the Living Head.

### ***'... WORSE THAN THE CHURCH...'***

On 2 May 1945, a special SS brigade set off on a secret mission to Austria. There, in a glacier on the summit of the Hochfeiler, at an altitude of 9,000 feet, the SS's sacred relics, seized from Wewelsburg Castle, had been buried. These sacred relics, according to the Nazis, were to fall into the hands of the successors who would lead the Fourth Reich. Who knows what was in those lead boxes — could it have been the Nazi Grail?

As for the 'Death's Head', neo-Nazis believe that Heinrich Himmler's head could fulfil that role today. However, on 23 May 1945, the Allies secretly buried the body of the former Reichsführer-SS. And now no one knows where the new 'Death's Head' is buried.

As Nigel Pennick writes in his book *\*Hitler's Secret Sciences\**, Hitler was anti-clerical. He often remarked that a tactical agreement with the Church 'would not prevent me from uprooting Christianity'. However, as Pennick writes:

'Hitler vehemently opposed the revival of ancient Nordic cults. He repeatedly attacked neo-paganism as something "worse than the Church"...

Hitler issued a special decree banning purely pagan worship. The German Führer stated that the Nazis should, for the time being, set aside an intellectual approach, but 'this must not take the form of a revival of the worship of Odin'. At the start of the Nazi era, the persecution of avowed Odinists began. In 1933,

Rudolf von Sebottendorf was arrested and exiled. The works of Odinist writers such as Lanz von Lebenfels, Reinhold Ebertin and Ernst Isberner-Galdan were banned... 'Odin is dead,' wrote Alfred Rosenberg, echoing his Führer... With the exception of Himmler, the Nazis regarded paganism as 'outdated material'.

## ***SEVEN HUNDRED YEARS***

Nevertheless, Hitler was of a highly mystical disposition. He claimed that human history passes through key turning points every seven hundred years. This coincides with an ancient German legend that a secret treasure — the Grail — miraculously emerges from the earth every seven centuries. Whoever possesses the Grail alters the course of human history...

The legend of the Holy Grail and its modern interpretation inspired the mystically inclined scholar Otto Rahn to embark on a search for the relic.

Rahn discovered that significant events in spiritual history took place in the years 544 and 1244 AD. The year 554 is the presumed date of King Arthur's death. Furthermore, Saint Benedict—the founder of the influential Order of Benedictine monks—died in 544. Benedict travelled throughout Europe, founding monasteries on the sites of ancient pagan sanctuaries. The most famous of these is the mountain monastery of Monte Cassino, situated on a mountaintop in the French Pyrenees.

In 1244, exactly seven hundred years later, this same monastery became the last refuge of the Cathar heretics, who put up resistance to the Catholics there.

Rahn suggested that the mountain monastery was precisely the place where the holy relic was hidden. The Holy Grail was first in the possession of Saint Benedict; after which the Holy Grail was hidden. It was then miraculously discovered by the Cathars in 1244 during their conflict with the Catholics. According to local legends, on the night before the final assault, three Cathars, saving the sacred relics of their faith, slipped unnoticed through the fortress wall. They carried away and hid in a safe place the magical regalia — what is known as the 'Holy Grail'.

***OTTO RANU WAS NOT ALLOWED TO LIVE TO SEE THE  
TURNING POINT IN HISTORY***

Ran considered 1944 to be a turning point in history. That year was to decide the fate of the world. And the Grail would reveal itself to the world once more, seven hundred years after the demise of the Cathars.

Anticipating this, Ran travelled to France in 1931 and undertook extensive excavations in the area around the monastery of Monte Cassino. Ran discovered underground passages. Many of the monastery's buildings, like the monastery as a whole, were oriented towards the rising sun. In 1933, Ran published the book *\*The Crusade Against the Grail\**, in which he recounts his discoveries. In his next book, *\*At the Court of Lucifer\**, Ran directly identifies the mountain monastery with the mountain fortress from ancient legends, in which the Holy Grail is kept. In 1937, Ran found

something which, in his view, was destined to change the course of history. A special SS aircraft delivered Ran's find personally to Heinrich Himmler. Jean-Michel Angebert claims that Ran found none other than the Holy Grail, which was taken to Wewelsburg Castle, where it was placed on a marble pedestal in the 'Realm of the Dead' crypt beneath the great hall.

According to some accounts, the Nazis 'rewarded' Ran for his efforts by sending him to a concentration camp, where he was killed in 1943. According to other sources, in 1939 Rahn committed ritual suicide on a mountain peak, following the custom of the Cathars. He left this world of his own accord, foreseeing its destruction.

### **CAPITULATION...**

This whole story has a remarkable sequel. In 1940, following France's capitulation, Himmler dispatched a high-profile archaeological expedition to the area of the mountain monastery. Large-scale excavations began immediately. Quite a few artefacts were found, and ancient burial sites were unearthed. The finds were carefully packed and, under heavy guard, sent to the Reich. Surely

was Himmler looking for the 'dead' head?

1944 was to be a turning point in human history — the Nazis were clearly in a hurry. In the early days of that 'turning point year', the legendary battle for the mountain monastery of Monte Cassino began. The orders received by General von Wittinghoff from the Reich's highest authorities were categorical — to hold the sacred mountain at any cost. The Germans genuinely believed that whoever controlled the 'sacred Mount Grail' would rule the whole world. On the German side, the monastery was defended by five infantry and four armoured divisions. The battle lasted four months.

On 14 March 1944, five hundred Allied bombers dropped over a tonne of bombs on the monastery in three and a half hours. The bombardment was then continued by six hundred heavy field guns. Such a massive attack was not launched by chance; according to Allied intelligence reports, the Germans were preparing to mark the 700th anniversary of the Cathar Holocaust on 16 March 1944. On that day, the course of history was to be altered. Although the Allies did not place much

, they decided to turn the tide of history in their favour with the help of bombs.

Nevertheless, on 16 March, Nazi leaders flew over the mountain in special aircraft emitting a plume of smoke. These aircraft circled the mountain, tracing a Celtic cross and the outline of a huge swastika in the air. This was followed by a rapid advance by the German 1st Parachute Division, which forced the Allies to retreat. The bombing of the monastery continued for another two months by combined British, Polish, Moroccan, New Zealand and American forces. And it was only on 18 May 1944, having wiped out all the monastery's defenders and reduced its walls to dust, that the Polish flag was raised above the monastery...

### ***WHAT RAMPA TOLD US***

It seems to me that this whole story of the 'Holy Grail' (as the Nazis understood and interpreted it) has a mythological aspect, which has its roots in the collective unconscious, as Carl Gustav Jung would have put it. Archetypal images of the 'Living Head', uttering prophecies and revealing the essence of phenomena to the protagonist, can be found in the ancient legends and traditions of a wide variety of peoples. No single people can lay claim to a 'monopoly' on the 'Living Head' or, as some Nazis called it, the 'Dead Head'. Myths about the 'Living Head' are part of the common Indo-European heritage. This head miraculously continues to live apart from its decapitated body. These legends and traditions are linked to myths about giants sleeping in the bowels of mountains, about the fertility god who rises and dies, and about a dark army awaiting its hour in the depths of the earth. This motif is also found in the works of modern authors; one need only recall Volkov's famous fairy tale 'The Seven Underground Kings'. According to some experts, this tale is based on the myths of East African peoples. But tales aside, these myths become almost reality in the accounts of 'truthful' mystically inclined travellers. Thus, Lobsang Rampa, whom some

consider the son of a high-ranking Tibetan dignitary, others an agent of German intelligence, writes in his book *\*The Third Eye\**:

‘I saw three black stone sarcophagi, decorated with engravings and curious inscriptions. They were not closed. When I peered inside, my breath caught in my throat... Three naked bodies, covered in gold, lay before my eyes. But they were enormous! The woman was over three metres tall, and the largest of the men was at least five metres. They had large heads, tapering slightly upwards like a cone, narrow jaws, small mouths and thin lips. Their noses were long and slender; their eyes were not slanted, but straight and deep-set.’

### ***THE CRYSTAL COFFIN SWAYS...***

Thus, Rampa saw in the Tibetan ‘repository’ sleeping giants, resembling Europeans in appearance, but encased in golden sarcophagi. But in what way, pray tell, does this information differ from European legends about sleeping heroes and mighty warriors of the Russian land?

Following the publication of *\*The Third Eye\**, the British press took an interest in who was hiding behind the pseudonym Lobsang Rampa. Some speculate that Rampa was in fact a Nazi spy who remained in Tibet after yet another occult expedition to the country. There are so many similarities in the narrative style of Rampa and that of the mystically inclined scientists of the Third Reich. The official authorities remain silent on the matter, citing copyright confidentiality, which in itself suggests that Lobsang Rampa is clearly a talented writer — and nothing more.

Another prominent writer, already well-known in post-Perestroika Russia—Ernst Muldashev—also follows in Rampa’s footsteps in claiming that he found himself in the very room where the giants were filmed—the ‘gene pool of humanity’. Ernst Muldashev is, of course, an eminent ophthalmologist, but it is still hard to believe him.

We can find similar pronouncements in the writings of E.P. Blavatsky. Thus, the story of the sleeping giants is not new, and has certainly

from yesterday. Remember how Alexander Pushkin wrote in ‘The Tale of the Dead Princess and the Seven Knights’:

‘...There is a high  
mountain With a deep  
cave within;  
In that cave, in the gloomy  
darkness, A crystal coffin  
sways... And in that crystal coffin  
The princess sleeps an eternal sleep.”

#### ***WHAT DID ONE DO WITH A BALM-EMBALMED HEAD***

As for the ‘Living Head’, Perseus carried one such head in his bag. Whoever Medusa the Gorgon looks upon turns to stone. That is precisely why ‘interacting’ with the ‘Living Head’ is a dangerous business. Fairy-tale heroes, possessing such a head, strive to hide it or bury it far away from temptation. Thus, an ancient Welsh legend from the 11th century tells of the head of the hero Bran, who undertakes a journey to the afterlife. After Bran’s death, his head served as a miraculous talisman. However, Bran’s God-fearing heirs chose to bury it in London. This burial of the head ensured the city’s prosperity and protected it from enemy raids. An ancient Icelandic legend tells of how the Vanir severed the head of the wise giant Mimir and sent it to Odin (Odin being the supreme god in Norse mythology), who embalmed the head and constantly sought his counsel. Thus, Mimir’s head serves as a link between the realms of darkness and light. The very word ‘Mimir’ seems to point to the realm of death and resonates with other figures of death, as well as with the Russian word ‘to die’. As linguists note, the name ‘Odin’ is derived from the Gothic ‘wops’ —

‘frenzied’ and corresponds to the West Germanic Wotan (Wotan). The etymology of this name points to excitement, poetic inspiration, and shamanic ecstasy. It is precisely these qualities that are important for those

who, by virtue of their office, are connected to the world of the dead — the priests. It is therefore not surprising that the attributes of ancient Icelandic and Celtic priests included the ‘dead head’ — a skull with which the priests ‘consulted’.

As we recall, Hitler issued a special decree banning the performance of neo-pagan rituals associated with Odin. However, this did not apply to Himmler, who, evidently, was a sort of priest of Nazism within the hierarchy of the Third Reich. The Nazis needed one leader and one priest; they tolerated no rivals...

## **Chapter 9. THE WOLF AS A MESSENGER OF DEATH AND LIFE**

In this chapter, the reader will find a story about psychologist Carl Jung's 'Land of the Dead'; about the Wild Hunter racing across the sky at Christmas; about Jung's mysterious tower; about H. G. Wells' phantasmagoria; the cult of Lenin; what Wotan and Woland have in common; a pack of wolves; how to switch from a horse to a wolf; what to say to a wolf if you meet one in the forest; about the Magi and wolves; about how a sorcerer arrived at a wedding; about bloodlust; about the impossibility of crossbreeding a sheepdog and a human; about goats — Thor's pack animals; as well as how goats come to life; and about how to give birth to a 'superman' and simply a 'good' person.

### **JUNG'S 'LAND OF THE DEAD' IS NOT LIKE HIMMLER'S 'REIGN OF THE DEAD'**

As we understand, it was not only the Nazis who attempted to revive the cult of the dead. A highly respected scholar such as Carl Gustav Jung was repeatedly observed doing so. Here is what Jung wrote in his book *\*On Life After Death\**:

'If we assume that life continues "there", we cannot conceive of any form of existence other than a psychic one, since the psyche requires neither space nor time to exist... The psyche should be understood as something belonging to the otherworld or the "land of the dead". And the unconscious and the "land of the dead" are essentially synonymous.'

Jung uses a term here that is practically analogous to the Nazi 'Realm of the Dead'. However, Jung's approach and that of the Nazis are, as they say, worlds apart.

Jung was fascinated by the mysteries of Wotan — the 'Wild Hunter', the messenger of death. Jung had prophetic dreams linked to the plots of the Germanic heroic epics. He wrote in his book *\*On Life After Death\** that once, in a dream, he found himself in a dense, gloomy forest, with fantastical boulders lying amongst mighty trees. Then he heard a piercing whistle and his knees buckled with terror.

‘A giant wolfhound with bared fangs burst out of the bushes with a crash. The sight of it made my blood run cold. It raced past, and then I understood. The wild hunter had ordered it to carry off a human soul. I awoke in mortal terror, and in the morning received news of my mother’s death. The hunter was Wotan, the god of the ancient Germanic peoples; he had taken my mother to join her ancestors. It was the Christian missionaries who turned Wotan into the devil. Originally, he was a god, like Mercury and Hermes; that is precisely how the Romans understood him—he was a spirit of nature, Merlin from the legend of the Holy Grail...’.

### ***‘THE WILD HUNTER’***

As we can see, turning to the pagan past is not in itself an unlawful or ‘anti-human’ act. The Germanic god Wodan (Wotan) was regarded as the bearer of magical power. Before battle, the Germanic tribes would ask him for victory. He promised victory to those tribes whom he would see first during the fight. It seems to me that this reflects Wodan’s role as a leader. The Russian words ‘voditel’ (‘driver’) and ‘predvoditel’ (‘leader’) are cognates of the Germanic god’s name. It is possible that the god’s name and his role date back to the earliest times of Indo-European unity.

As for Wotan’s so-called ‘Wild Hunt’, ancient Germanic legends tell of Wotan racing across the sky during a winter storm around Christmas, surrounded by his retinue of the dead and hounds. A wild howl rings out, causing domestic dogs to whimper. This image, for example, is perfectly illustrated by A.S. Pushkin’s poem ‘The Demons’, an excerpt from which I have already quoted. As we can see, attitudes towards such legends can vary. Christians regard the journey at Christmas as the work of demons; the ancient Germans believed that Wotan took people’s souls during his celestial voyage.

Wotan, like the Norse Odin, is a god of war and the warrior host. Furthermore, both are sowers of military strife. Odin was the instigator of the first war between the Aesir and the Vanir. He was the first to hurl a spear—a symbol of war magic—into the ranks of the Vanir. Odin sacrifices himself

sacrifices himself when, pierced by his own spear, he hangs for nine days on the World Tree Yggdrasil... Odin, taken captive, suffers for eight days between two fires until, at last, the young Agnar gives him a drink. Then Odin begins to prophesy and causes the enemy to fall upon his own sword. As we can see, Odin's character is not the best. In general, it must be said that in some respects Odin resembles a character well known to us — Koschei the Immortal and Gorynych the Serpent. All that self-torture, capricious temperament and self-sacrifice...

### ***AN INHUMAN CULT***

Odin's mystical story is quite remarkable. He journeys to the underworld and awakens a velva (prophetess) who is slumbering in a mortal sleep. He then extracts from her the fate of men and gods... Odin, the magician and sorcerer, the father of sorcery, the master of the magical runes, the god of wisdom. He constantly consults the dead head of the sage Mimir.

Odin's crucifixion on the World Tree points to the shamanic nature of his cult. His constant communication with the dead makes him a figure who bridges the two worlds — the world of the living and the world of the dead. Undoubtedly, the Nazis appropriated the outward aspects of the myth of Odin in order to somehow justify their actions. Meanwhile, it would be entirely wrong to assume that some kind of inherent malice and fatalism is hidden within ancient legends. The Nazis had their own inhuman cult. They utilised the archetypal elements of the myth, to use Jung's words, which allowed them to retain the outward form of the myth whilst imbuing it with an entirely different geopolitical content. If one can speak of continuity here, it is not continuity with ancient myths, but with the colonial policy of the West, which had been pursued for more than a century.

However, it is striking that the Nazi 'project' ended exactly as it did in the myth. Here, too, there was self-torture and the torture of others, self-sacrifice and an attempt to create a cult of the dead. With the sole difference that it was not the main hero who had to endure all this, but the German people as a whole. The grief and

suffering that befell the Russian people because of this venture are immeasurable! Clearly, one should not ‘tinker’ with ancient myths, even if they seem very appealing. And one certainly should not extrapolate them to an entire nation, distorting the myth’s meaning. The selfless heroes of myths have little in common with the leaders of the Third Reich.

### ***THE MYSTERIOUS TOWER ON THE SHORE OF THE LAKE***

As for Jung, he had been a great devotee of spiritualism from a young age. In the company of his female relatives—young women—he would hold séances during which he communicated with his deceased ancestors. These occult exercises continued until the round wooden table, at which the spirits were summoned, suddenly cracked right down the middle during a séance. Evidently, it was then, in 1895, that Jung truly realised that spiritualism was no mere game, but a reality. ‘The realm of the dead’ really does exist, Jung wrote.

Communing with the otherworld enabled him to discover hidden talents. Thus, Jung unexpectedly began to write magnificent poetry. After that, he imagined himself to be the reincarnation of Johann Goethe... Although who knows, perhaps that was actually the case....

There is also a curious incident that occurred on the eve of his break with Sigmund Freud. One day, the two masters argued over whether parapsychology should be considered a true science, just like psychology. Freud was adamant and categorical — no, it cannot. He spoke sharply and rudely about parapsychology. And Jung suddenly felt, against his will, a wave of indignation rising within his chest, ready to burst forth and tear Freud apart. And at that very moment, a terrible crash rang out from Freud’s bookcase. All the shelves in the bookcase had collapsed. The mystically inclined Jung took this as a sign of a rupture... The spirits had told him that it was not worth arguing with someone who did not believe in their existence.

***In 1923, Jung purchased a small plot of land on the shores of Lake Zurich. Over time, he built a round tower there, to which he admitted no outsiders. He personally carved magical symbols onto boulders brought to him by labourers and placed these boulders inside the tower. Jung believed that with the help of this tower, one could visit the Land of the Dead...***

It is said that as Jung was dying, lightning struck a tree near the tower. A few years later, a friend of his – a film director – was making a film about Jung. And, as luck would have it, a storm suddenly broke out and lightning struck that very same tree once more. The director took this as a mystical sign.

### **HERBERT WELLS' PHANTASMAGORIA**

To be fair, it must be said that the cult of the deceased ancestors flourished not only in Nazi Germany, but also in the USSR. We are talking about the one who is 'more alive than all the living'. The body of the leader of the 'world proletariat' is still kept in a pyramid clad in red granite on Red Square. From the outside, this pyramid looks like some sort of toy replica of the pyramids of the American Indians. Inside, however, it is all very serious — the leader's body rests in a special hall. The leader lies on his high bed in a semi-seated position. His eyelids are closed... it seems as though in another minute, he will open them...

I seem to recall reading a book by H. G. Wells as a child about a leader who had fallen into a long sleep. The leader was placed in a sarcophagus with a glass lid and kept there for two hundred years. And then the leader suddenly awoke, looked around and rose from his regal bed, dangling his bare feet over the side. The cleaner was the first to notice. She ran out screaming... An emergency meeting of the leadership council was convened to decide what to do with the leader. After all, so much had changed in two hundred years — the world had changed, and the government had no interest in the 'second coming of the leader'. Some controversial figures at a secret meeting of the council even suggested putting the leader to sleep...

However, the workers somehow learnt that the leader had awoken from his two-century-long slumber, and undertook a daring attempt to rescue him from his regal bedchamber. A hand

. However, the enemies switched on a powerful fan, and the leader saw workers' blood dripping from his severed hand...

Nevertheless, the delegation of workers was eventually granted an audience with the leader — they didn't dare refuse them. The leader, having been fed sandwiches by the workers, sat upon his bed and passionately urged them to launch a new revolution...

I don't know how things turned out for Wells. The book was taken away from me....

### ***WHO IS MORE ALIVE THAN ALL THE LIVING?***

Mind you, you don't need to read Wells to judge the cult of the leader's memory. You just had to wake up at about five o'clock, go to Alexandrovsky Garden and join the end of a long queue. The KGB officers lined up the people wishing to view V.I. Lenin in pairs. The queue moved quietly in the pre-dawn gloom and made sharp bends, strangely resembling a living bolt of lightning. Inside the mausoleum, the queue wound in a U-shape around the leader's body; and the crowd, utterly overwhelmed by what they had seen, spilled out in a disorderly stream somewhere behind the 'pyramid' by the Kremlin wall.

Why did we, the 'Sovoks', go there? Probably not a single former 'Sovok' today could answer that question. It was a sacramental ritual of initiation into the mystery of the leader. I recall that M.N. Zadornov recounted with great humour how V.V. Zhirinovsky went to throw the leader out of the mausoleum. He set a time for the journalists. And they, eager for a scoop, gathered at the mourning doors. The guard of honour was no longer there. V.V. Zhirinovsky went inside. He was not allowed in, and there was an exchange of insults. A short while later, according to M.N. Zadornov, the politician emerged with a black eye, muttered something incomprehensible to the journalists and left immediately. 'Who gave Zhirinovsky that black eye?' asked M.N. Zadornov sarcastically. And he answered his own question. 'Well, of course it was the one who 'more alive than anyone else'.

It seems to me that Zhirinovsky's real or imagined visit to Lenin is a continuation of that same blind faith in the

cult of the leader. Those who set up a sacred pantheon on Red Square were counting on maximum impact on the masses. Those who removed the leader's brain from his skull and then studied it at the specially created Brain Institute had not the slightest doubt about the actual death of the leader of the 'world proletariat'. It is unlikely that these people in 'white coats' believed in the cult of the dead. However, the archetypal aspects of consciousness are strong within us. The 'unconscious' or the 'Land of the Dead', to use Jung's terminology, is present within us, within each and every one of us.

### ***THE LENIN CULT***

So why did the people go to the leader?

V.V. Mayakovsky attempted to answer this question; remember, he wrote: 'Two in the room — I and Lenin', and also: 'I cleanse myself beneath Lenin', 'Even today, he is more alive than all the living'.

And indeed, people visited Lenin in order to commune with his 'indomitable spirit', with his 'fiery soul'. Lenin, like a 'living embalmed head' of Odin, was meant to guide us from the afterlife. Remember the song: 'The revolution has a beginning, but no end...'. As V.V. Mayakovsky wrote: 'In the coming communist abundance, prepare a new revolution of the spirit.' It was this 'revolution' that our leaders prepared and carried out during perestroika. It is another matter that, by a strange twist of fate, the revolution turned into a counter-revolution. Evidently, the leaders did not visit the mausoleum often enough, nor did they spend enough time standing before the body of the man who had set all this in motion. Although they could have done so in their spare time, away from the people, in silence. Nothing prevented them from indulging in reflection beside the body of the 'most human of men' himself. Remember, in schools, works and factories, there were 'Lenin Rooms'. As a rule, there was a plaster bust of Lenin standing there, and photographs from the 'Leniniana' collection were hung on the walls. Personally, the atmosphere of this room, wherever it was located — in a school, in barracks, or in a factory — always evoked associations with a cult of the dead. Next to it, like an iconostasis, hung photographs of the members of the Politburo. These

the successors of the successors, those who lead us along the ‘Leninist path’. Where are you now, ‘members of the Politburo’? ‘Some are no more, and those who remain are far away’.

However, I do not recall there ever being ‘Lenin Rooms’ in academic circles. Scientists, inclined towards rational thinking, have always been ‘terribly far removed from the people’. Thus, the ‘cult of Lenin’ is a typical cult of the dead, borrowed from paganism. At the same time, this cult differs from paganism as much as heaven differs from earth.

### **VODAN, WOTAN, VOLAND**

However, let us return to Wodan — the West Germanic god. The ecstatic nature of this god demands action, even if that action leads to self-destruction.

This god is associated with the realm of the dead; two ferocious wolves serve Vodan, just as they do the Norse Odin...

Proper names can undergo remarkable metamorphoses in writers’ works. Take, for example, M.A. Bulgakov’s *\*The Master and Margarita\**. As they say, this is a very telling example. The main character is Woland. You must agree that this name bears a resemblance to Wotan (Wotan). At the end of Bulgakov’s novel, Wotan, together with his companions, transforms into archetypal knights. They all race through the air on their magical horses, just as Wotan races across the sky with his fairy-tale retinue. Serving Woland, however, is not a wolf, nor even a dog, but a cat (Behemoth), which is also highly significant. The image of the talking cat Boyun is frequently found in folk tales. This is a ‘talking’

**‘bayan’** (from the verb **‘bayan’**; related words include **‘bayu-bayushki bayu’**, **‘ubayukat’** and **‘obayat’**) cat. Remember Pushkin’s cat: ‘...goes to the right — he starts a song; to the left — he tells a tale...’

Woland appears, as if by magic, not just anywhere, but in Moscow. What was this half-fairy-tale, half-fantasy character doing in the capital of the proletarian state? His unexpected appearance can be interpreted as an attack by a hostile (dark) force. And indeed, a few years after the novel was written, the USSR

Hitler will attack, armed with an archaic neo-pagan cult. Hitler, of course, does not worship Wodan and Odin. Nevertheless, Himmler's SS Black Order can be likened to a pack of wolves led by Wodan.

Perhaps the mystically inclined Bulgakov, communicating with the spirits of his ancestors, somehow learnt from them of the impending attack by the Nazis?

This is, of course, a hypothesis. But anything is possible in this world.

### ***THE PACK OF WOLVES***

As far as I can recall, the image of the wolf does not feature in Hitler or Himmler's ideology. That would have been a clear borrowing from ancient myths. Nevertheless, an ancient myth could have manifested itself in the actions of the fascists in a paradoxical and miraculous way — it was not for nothing that Soviet propaganda referred to the Nazis as a 'wolf pack'.

However, the term 'wolf pack' did not always carry a negative connotation. One need only think of folk tales. For instance, among the Ossetians—who certainly cannot be suspected of sympathising with a fascist way of thinking—the heroic progenitor, the leader of a tribe or a band, has since time immemorial been called a wolf or one with a wolf's head, literally—

**'wolf-headed'**. Bhima, the hero of the ancient Indian epic \*Mahabharata\*, also possesses wolf-like traits. And these traits reveal his heroic origins and mission. The nickname of the Georgian king Vakhtang I Gorgasali is 'wolf-headed'. This nickname, as linguists say, is derived from the Persian word **'gurgsar'**, literally 'wolf-headed'. It is quite possible that the word **'hussar'**, familiar to us all, is derived from this word.

Thus, in ancient times, bearing a wolf's head on one's shoulders was a matter of great honour. Let us recall the stories of how a she-wolf suckled Romulus and Remus, as well as the ancient Iranian legend of the she-wolf who suckled Cyrus. A 7th-century chronicle tells of the ancestors of the Turks, who were exterminated by their enemies. All perished except for one boy, who had been suckled by a she-wolf. This she-wolf became his wife and

gave birth to ten sons by him. A similar legend also existed among the Mongols.

According to a Hittite text from the 17th century BC, King Hattusili I addresses his army and urges them to be united as a 'wolf family'. A similar concept of the wolf pack as a symbol of the prince's retinue is known among the Svans in the Caucasus. The ancient Germanic peoples would dress in wolf skins during festivals...

### ***HOW TO SWITCH FROM A HORSE TO A WOLF***

It can be surmised, based on some indirect evidence, that Zmey Gorynych did not always have the head of a serpent, but in his legendary existence had the head of a wolf. This is the origin of the Slavic folklore character known as the Fiery Wolf. Moreover, the very sound of the name Gorynych, as well as the Greek name Gorgon, is similar to the Persian word 'wolf-headed'.

The ritual of dressing in wolf skins and walking about with a wolf's head is known among many peoples of Europe, including the South and West Slavs. It was timed to coincide with December, which was called 'the wolf month'; for example, among the Latvians it was '*vilka menesis*'. The Russian character Karachun is also associated with the wolf, as is the ancient Rus' god Veles (Volos). Some believe that a substitution took place at some point. Veles's true name was lost, and he came to be called 'hairy' after the wolf that personified him. The word 'hairy' then became a proper name. In the process, the original meaning of the word was largely lost. Evidently, both the bear and the wolf were initially representatives of the god, and later came to personify him directly. This is precisely why the wolf in Rus' is traditionally associated with the realm of the dead and with death. At the same time, the horse is its opposite and personifies life and the sun. This is clearly illustrated in folk tales. Thus, in the tale 'Ivan Tsarevich and the Grey Wolf', the wolf devours Ivan Tsarevich's horse and thereafter becomes his 'horse' himself. He carries his rider to the afterlife, where Ivan Tsarevich rescues (awakens from eternal sleep) his bride. And it is the wolf who then brings them both back to this world. There is no doubt that the wolf in this

fairy tale is conceived as something more than a folkloric zoomorphic character — he is the king of the dead — Beles.

### ***TO THE WOLF — ‘WELL DONE!’***

Folk incantations speak of the wolf’s special role as a link between the world of the living and the dead. If you meet a wolf in the forest, you must, without fearing it, greet it: ‘Well done, lad!’.

You should then strike up a conversation with the wolf, answering for him:

“Have you been to  
the other world? I  
have.  
Did you see the  
dead? I did.  
Do the dead bite? No.  
And you mustn’t bite either!”

In Polesia, when encountering a wolf, one must call out the names of one’s deceased relatives. The wolf will listen and flee into the thicket. The wolf’s connection to the world of the dead is evident in certain Christmas customs, such as inviting it, along with the house spirit and deceased relatives, to a festive dinner.

Perhaps no one today even remembers the connection between Veles and the wolf, but much is known about the wolf’s connection with the patron saint of livestock, St. Vlas, as well as St. George, or Yegor, or Yuri. For example, St George took over from his predecessor Veles the important role of patron of wild animals — the bear and the wolf. Among the Russians, the wolf is known as ‘Yury’s dog’. According to folk beliefs, St Egor rides a wolf. On the eve of his feast day, he gathers his pack and distributes the spoils, instructing them as to whose livestock they should carry off and whose they should not. Hence the saying: ‘Whatever the wolf has in its teeth, Egor has given!’ One folk tale tells of a widow whose last cow—her sole source of sustenance—was carried off by a wolf, because

a place is reserved for her in the kingdom of heaven, where there are ‘rivers of milk and shores of jelly’.

Belarusians believe that on the feast of St George in autumn, he ‘unlocks their jaws’, and on the feast of ‘St George in spring’ — ‘locks their jaws’. In connection with this, it was believed that a foal born in summer would not be eaten by a wolf.

### ***THE FIRE-BREATHING WOLF, THE MAGI***

In Slavic mythology, there was a most curious character — the Fire-Wolf. According to ancient Russian beliefs, he was born of the Fire Serpent and came into the world in human form. He bore marks on his body that irrefutably indicated his miraculous birth; amongst other things, his body was covered in wolf’s fur.

Legends about the Fire-Wolf are similar to European legends about a star-child born of a star. According to folklore, after a violent storm, infants are sometimes found in the forest near villages, bearing marks on their bodies that indicate their miraculous birth. Anyone who takes such a baby into their family and raises him may face utter ingratitude. The child will grow up callous, cruel, and prone to vagrancy, military games and expeditions. The Star Boy is none other than the Fire-Wolf.

In Russian mythology, the Fire-Wolf Serpent possesses an astonishing ability from birth—he can transform himself at will into a wolf, a bear, or other animals. In Slavic mythology, he is known as a **werewolf**. Evidently, this character is associated with the cult of Veles. His ability to shapeshift allows this miraculously born child to visit another world

— the realm of the dead. An Old Russian legend has survived about Vseslav, Prince of Polotsk (11th century), who possessed such an ability. It is quite interesting that the Slavs had another name for a werewolf, a word derived from the verb **vedati** — ‘to know’. In Ukrainian, this is ‘**vvdun**’; in Old Czech, ‘**vedi**’; in Slovenian, ‘**vedomei**’, ‘**vtdunci**’, and so on. These words mean ‘werewolf’. Here we see an indication

to the priestly function of the ‘werewolf’. It is not only the prince — a representative of authority — who transforms himself into a wolf, and his retinue, but also the priest who possesses secret knowledge and is capable of travelling through the realm of the dead. In this regard, a semantic and linguistic parallel suggests itself: in Rus’, priests—ministers of the pagan cult—were called **volkhvs** or **volkhs**. This word, it would seem, is a slightly altered form of the word ‘wolf’. You must agree that the difference between ‘volkh’ and ‘wolf’ lies solely in their pronunciation.

### ***‘The Sorcerer Came to a Peasant Wedding’***

It is quite interesting that the connection between the Fire-Wolf and the element of fire is indicated by such a seemingly distant word as ‘volcano’. In the old days, according to V.I. Dal, people did not say ‘vulkan’ but ‘volkan’. The fire-breathing mountain was evidently likened to the folkloric Fire-Serpent. On the other hand, the Fire-Serpent was known in the old days as Zmiulan, which phonetically bears a distant resemblance to ‘vulkan’.

Zmiulan is identical to Veles. According to Belarusian and Russian fairy tales, Tsar Fire and Tsarina Malanitsa (Lightning) burn the herds of Tsar Zmiulan, who hides from them in the hollow of an old oak tree. Then lightning strikes this oak and burns it down... Here we see an unmistakable mythological ‘echo’ of the main Slavic myth about the thunderer’s adversary — the serpent who stole the thunderer’s herds and hides from him in the hollow of an oak tree.

Thus, we can draw the general conclusion that the Fiery Wolf, Zmiulan, Veles, and the wolf are different incarnations of the adversary of the Thunderer, the ruler of the underworld. Over time, attitudes towards these characters changed. The ability of a ‘werewolf’ to transform into a wolf or other animals was re-evaluated and came to be viewed negatively. Thus, in pre-revolutionary Russia, there were folk tales that sorcerers (the heirs of the Magi) would turn entire wedding processions into wolves. The negative attitude towards sorcerers is also reflected in a painting by a pre-revolutionary artist entitled ‘The Sorcerer’s Arrival at a Peasant Wedding’. The artist

vividly depicted the general confusion and fear caused by the sorcerer's appearance at the wedding.

### **MAGICIANS AND WOLVES**

Meanwhile, the conceptual link between sorcerers and their predecessors, the volkhvs, and the theme of marriage is a very ancient one. We may surmise that in times past, just as today, marriages were blessed; and this was done by the priests of the local cult—the volkhvs. In this we see a motif familiar to us — the Old Russian consciousness identified the heavenly fire, of which the cult priest — the magus — was the rightful guardian, with the earthly fire burning within the bodies of the young couple. Thanks to this fire, they conceived children, and the human race did not come to an end.

In Indo-European traditions (in particular, the Hittite tradition), the transformation of the groom into a wolf was associated with a common form of marriage—bride-kidnapping (the forcible abduction of the bride). Thus, in the Central Russian dialect, the word 'wolf' is also used to refer to the best man on the groom's side. In northern Russian laments sung by the bride, the groom's brothers are called 'grey wolves'. In Polesie, seeing a wolf in a dream foretold to a young woman the arrival of her fiancé and the coming of the matchmakers. This motif of identifying the future fiancé with a wolf can be found in folk songs: 'The maidens were reeling flax, reeling flax, Reeling and sorting, Not letting the ground lie fallow.' The maidens feared the grey wolf. They did not fear the wolf that roams the forest, hunting grey sheep. But they feared the wolf that prowls the fields, seeking red-cheeked maidens. Wherever the lad appeared, he seized the maiden across her waist, by her silk sash, and led her into the woods...

The motif of a wolf stealing a sheep also features in the Christmas masquerade play 'Wolves and Sheep'. Here is how this play is described in the Tver Governorate:

'They dress as wolves — turning a sheepskin coat inside out. First comes the shepherdess. Then the "wolf" runs in. He grabs the girl, the "sheep". The shepherdess says: "Oh, the wolf has stolen the sheep. A fine sheep, of good stock. She was walking with that ram, and had been mated." And so the trial was held.'

In the Russian folk tale ‘Ivan Tsarevich and the Grey Wolf’, the wolf actually helps Ivan Tsarevich to ‘snatch’ his bride from the realm of death. Evidently, the wolf can be likened here to a sorcerer presiding over the wedding ceremony.

### ***THIRST FOR BLOOD***

Of course, I would not wish to ‘demonise’ the beloved Russian folk tale character—the wolf. But still, I suppose I must say that, for me personally, the SS evoke associations with a pack of wolves. Perhaps this is because the SS wear black uniforms with insignia that remind us of the cult of the dead. In this context, Himmler, the head of the Black Order, could be perceived as a werewolf — a ‘wolf-headed’ figure. If this association of mine holds any water, then the ritual werewolfism of the ancient warriors has thus found an unexpected and not entirely fitting continuation in modern German history.

I cannot say for certain, but I believe Hitler said that he absolved his soldiers of responsibility and granted them the freedom to kill indiscriminately, just as a predatory beast does. Indeed, ancient warriors would perform a special ritual before battle, thereby stirring up a frenzied spirit within themselves. In battle, they were likened to wolves slaughtering a flock of sheep, intoxicated by blood. And indeed, wolves, once they have entered a frenzy, cannot stop and slaughter the entire flock, far more than they can eat.

Echoes of rituals involving transformation into a wolf can be seen in medieval European legends. Tales of the atrocities committed by werewolves are blood-curdling. According to these legends, werewolves transformed into wolves solely to satisfy their consuming passion — their thirst for blood.

### ***IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO CROSS A HUMAN WITH A SHEEPDOG***

‘Dogs of war’ accompany the Germanic god of war, Odin. A similar concept is found in Georgian mythology, as well as in the cult of Mars. We may suspect that the Russian Yarila, the Belarusian Yarylo, the Ukrainian Yarilo, the Sudal Yarun and the Baltic Yarovit were once gods of war, and also had

‘dogs of war’. This is indicated in particular by the root ‘yar’ — a rather ancient term (meaning ‘fierce’) associated with a military function. Evidently, in days gone by, it was an honour to be a ‘fierce’ warrior. Military valour was valued above all other merits. The fact that the fascists borrowed this ‘wolf-like’ or ‘dog-like’ image from ancient mythology in no way compromises either ancient mythology or, even less so, our distant ancestors. Moreover, times change — what was acceptable once is unacceptable today.

However, the fascists went too far. I read somewhere that in Nazi Germany, experiments were conducted to hybridise humans with German shepherds. Of course, these experiments could not have ended successfully — the difference in the chromosome sets of humans and dogs is too great for an embryo to begin developing. But the very fact that such experiments were carried out (if, of course, they did take place) speaks volumes.

Admittedly, attempts were also made in Soviet Russia to crossbreed humans and animals. For instance, Professor Ivanov carried out experiments on combining humans with apes. The Sukhum Monkey Reserve was established for this very purpose at the time. According to obscure rumours, attempts were made in the USSR to crossbreed humans and dolphins. Having learnt of these experiments from an acquaintance, the science-fiction writer Alexander Belyaev wrote his famous book  
\*The Amphibian Man\*.

All in all, the history of various countries contains a host of unsavoury chapters that official historians prefer to skip over without reading.

## ***GOATS — THE TORAH’S BEAST OF BURDEN***

Paradoxically, the ancient wedding role of the wolf as a folkloric figure also manifested itself among the SS. As Nicholas Goodrick-Clark writes in his book *\*The Occult Roots of Nazism\**, Himmler's 'personal magician', Willi Gut, conducted wedding ceremonies at Wewelsburg Castle for SS officers and their brides, 'at which Weishor (Willi Gut) appeared with an ivory staff topped with a blue ribbon, bearing runes inscribed upon it'. I think there is no need to explain to readers what this staff symbolised.

It is clear that brides for the SS elite were selected with great care. The leaders of the Reich were obsessed with the idea of producing 'pure Aryans'; in this, they drew on the wealth of experience in selective breeding accumulated by science in the field of animal cross-breeding. Here is what Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier wrote on this subject in their book *\*The Morning of the Magi\**: 'Hitler's aim was not to establish a master race or to conquer the world. For him, these were merely means to achieve the 'great cause' of which he dreamed. His true aim was a creative endeavour, a 'divine' endeavour: a biological mutation whose result was to be the ascension of humanity, 'the emergence of a humanity of heroes, demigods and supermen'. As we understand, concrete efforts were made to bring about the 'heroes, demigods and superhumans'; the matter was not limited to mere declarations. One need only recall the 'Thor' project, in which 100 specially selected German women were inseminated with Hitler's sperm.

It is worth recalling that in Germanic-Norse mythology, Thor is the god of thunder, storms and fertility. Thor rides a chariot drawn by goats. The hammer is the traditional weapon of the god of thunder. His adversary is the world serpent. Researchers quite rightly point to the similarities between Thor and Perun, Indra and other Indo-European gods of thunder. **The word for 'hammer' shares the same root as the word for 'lightning' in Russian.** It is not impossible that Thor originally wielded lightning rather than a hammer. Lightning, as we know, is an attribute of wedding rituals. And the hammer, with a certain degree of generalisation, can be interpreted as the male reproductive organ. The goats—Thor's mounts—also point to the function of fertility.

### ***WHY DO GOATS COME TO LIFE?***

In southern Scandinavia, rock carvings have been discovered depicting the god with an axe, and sometimes with a hammer. Carved alongside them are the solar symbol—a wheel—and an image of a goat. This is evidence of the considerable antiquity of the cult of Thor.

In mythology, Thor's battle-axe (and sometimes his hammer) possesses a miraculous property. It returns to its owner like a boomerang. Thor's goats are also magical. They serve as an endless source of food for Thor and his guests. According to legend, whenever Thor stops for the night, he slaughters goats every evening and roasts them over a fire. He leaves the bones untouched. In the morning, the goats that have been eaten miraculously come back to life. On one occasion, Thor had guests, and one of them, disregarding Thor's prohibition, began to gnaw on the goat's bones. As a result, the goat—which Thor had brought back to life that morning—became lame. Such miraculous goats undoubtedly symbolise the function of fertility—ritualised death and the subsequent inevitable rebirth.

Similar ideas, perhaps expressed in a slightly different form, are characteristic of Indian mythology, as well as of Slavic and other Indo-European mythologies. Thus, in a Russian folk tale, the hero's bones, scattered across a field, are gathered by his sister. She then pours 'dead water' over them, and the bones become covered in flesh. After this comes the turn of the 'living water', and the hero comes back to life. In a similar way, a horse is brought back to life in fairy tales.

Evidently, the Nazis saw in the myth of Thor a source of inspiration for their own speculations on this subject. They believed that it was possible to resurrect and revive the soul of a hero, a warrior or a king by performing a special ritual at his grave. Afterwards, the soul enters the womb of a future biological mother. And the hero is reborn. Clearly, this was linked to the Nazis' ideas about the rebirth of the superhuman.

### ***HOW TO GIVE BIRTH TO A SUPERMAN?***

However, dreams of giving birth to a superhuman were not unique to the Nazis. D.S. Merezhkovsky had already written about this. Thus, amongst the Russian intelligentsia of the early 20th century, there were widespread ideas that it was possible to give birth to an outstanding personality, the Pharaoh of Egypt... and even Jesus Christ in his new incarnation, provided the appropriate occult ritual was performed. According to some accounts, Akhmatova and Gumilev, having mystically prepared themselves for the momentous event—the birth of a child—first entered into spiritual contact with a ‘great personality’. They then conceived the body of this ‘great personality’ in the Bois de Boulogne in Paris. It is difficult to say whom the poets ‘wanted’ to ‘acquire’, but Lev Gumilev was born — a highly respected and extraordinary figure. Gumilev is known for his theory of passionarity.

During the ‘SS weddings’ in Wewelsburg, Willigut would, through spiritual means, make contact with ‘the great personalities of Greater Germany’ and, in a special way, blessed their forthcoming rebirth in a new body.

As Andrei Vasilchenko wrote in his book *\*The Mysticism of the SS\**:

‘Even before the emergence of the Third Reich, in the “Bible of Nazism”, *\*Mein Kampf\**, written by Hitler, there was mention of a ‘divine spark’ that had fallen upon the Aryan race, which, in his view, entitled it to world domination.”

Evidently, the ‘divine spark’ entered, in Hitler’s view, the womb of the German race precisely in the period preceding its rebirth. Here is what Hitler himself said:

‘Creation is not yet complete. Man is clearly approaching a new phase of transformation. The old human race is already entering a stage of decline; only a few will survive... All creative power will be concentrated in the new race... It will infinitely surpass the new man... Do you now understand the profound meaning of our National Socialist movement?’

A large-scale programme of the forced Aryanisation of peoples and genetic experiments were intended to ensure the birth the ‘new man’.

### ***HOW TO CONCEIVE A ‘GOOD’ CHILD?***

Perhaps it is just as well that the Nazis failed in their grandiose plans to bring forth the 'new-old man'. However, this idea of giving birth to a specific historical figure was by no means invented by the Nazis. As far back as the ancient Indian code of laws — the 'Laws of Manu' — there are references to how one should prepare for conception, how this conception should be carried out, and where, in order to come into direct contact with the personality of the future child. Unfortunately, this ancient science has largely been lost today. Only a faint glimmer of it remains in our folk myths and fairy tales, rituals and legends, incantations and songs.

Modern people hardly ever think about this at all — who they are conceiving... and for what purpose? As sociology shows, some people are conceived by chance. The conception of others is timed to coincide with a holiday — New Year's, a birthday, and so on. Children are often conceived whilst intoxicated — and this is not at all good. As modern occultism tells us, in such a state there is a likelihood that a soul of a completely different level to that which the parents would wish for will enter the conceived body.

Of course, no one in good health and in their right mind would want to conceive a child who, when grown up, would become a rapist or a murderer. However, modern science tells us that the qualities of a future child are either nurtured or inherited. Yet science remains silent on the subject of the immortal soul that enters the body of the conceived embryo. What this soul is like is unknown to science. After all, our science does not even believe in the soul.

## **Chapter 10. WONDERS BEYOND BELIEF UNDER THE BLACK SKIN**

This chapter tells of the ‘Conqueror of Death’; of rituals of reanimation; of Hermes Trismegistus and his secret teachings; of Mercury, Cupid and Ivan Kupala; of flights on the night of Ivan Kupala; of the magical herb terlich; about ‘okrutniki’ and those under a spell; about whether it is better to ‘drown’ or ‘sprinkle’; and also about who hides beneath the wolf’s skin, and in whose forehead the red sun shines; about the queen who gave birth to the sun, the moon and the morning star; about the wondrous maiden; about the white swan; about the scarlet flower and the renewed man.

### **‘THE CONQUEROR OF DEATH’**

European folklore features no shortage of unpleasant ‘wolf-like’ characters. These include the Scandinavian vargs — werewolves — and the Western European werewolves, who move ‘with the speed of lightning’ at night, and the Lithuanian vilkolakp, who feast on human flesh... To these we can add the Slavic ‘volkodlaki’, which have already been mentioned, as well as ‘perevertyshti’ (i.e. those who turn themselves inside out by rolling over a knife stuck in a tree stump and transform into wolves), and ghouls and vampires, whose bodies bear wolf-like markings. Thus, according to legend, vampires have wolf’s paws, sharp wolf’s fangs and pointed ears, and a foul odour emanates from their mouths... Vargs have the head of a wolf and the body of a human. This strange symbiosis of wolf-like and human features in a single being points to the ancient cult of the ‘wolf-headed ones’, once widespread amongst many peoples. Incidentally, the word ‘wolf-headed’ is similar in pronunciation to the Slavic word ‘volkodlak’. It is quite possible that ‘volkodlak’ is a variant of ‘wolf-headed’.

There were times when being a werewolf (the ability to transform into a wolf and other animals) was considered an honour. It was a privilege reserved for priests and princes. Perhaps the icon of St Christopher — the protector against infectious diseases — can be regarded as a certain echo of ancient cults. A 16th-century copy of such an icon is known from the Chudov Monastery in the Kremlin. On it, St Christopher is depicted in warrior’s garb with a spear and a wolf’s head. Moreover, there is a halo above his head.

Evidently, the figure of St Christopher with a wolf's head was interpreted as the personification of the 'conqueror of death'.

### ***RITUAL OF REVIVAL***

We may also recall that Ivan the Terrible's Oprichniki would attach a severed dog's head to their saddles, which served as a symbol of power. Indeed, the common expression 'dogs of war' did not always carry a negative connotation... The Oprichniki, with a dog's head fastened to their saddles, were perceived by the people as emissaries of the king of the dead.

The image of the dog as a 'messenger of death' also features in Arthur Conan Doyle's \*The Hound of the Baskervilles\*. The mystically inclined author was seriously involved in spiritualism. It seems that the image of the 'fiery hound' did not arise in his mind by chance, but was inspired by ancient legends, or, as we say today, 'archetypes'.

In this context, let us recall the funerary 'wolf' cult. Echoes of this cult can still be found in modern Russia.

It is interesting that in Egyptian mythology, the chief god of the realm of the dead was Anubis. It was he who judged the hearts of the dead. At the same time, Osiris in the Egyptian cult of the dead personified the pharaoh. Anubis guards Osiris's body when he dies and participates in his resurrection. Here we see a clear parallel with the fairy tale 'Ivan Tsarevich and the Grey Wolf'. Anubis oversees the process of preparing the deceased's body for embalming. Once the embalming is complete, Anubis places his hands on the mummy and transforms the deceased into **an 'akh'** ('the enlightened one', 'the blessed one'), who is miraculously brought back to life by this very gesture...

It is also quite interesting what Anubis looked like — he had the head of a jackal or a wild dog (Sab), and the body of a human... Anubis is often depicted as a jackal or a dog.

In a Russian fairy tale, after Ivan Tsarevich has been killed, the wolf seizes a young crow and, threatening to harm it, forces the crow to bring 'dead' water and then 'living' water in its beak. Having sprinkled first the 'dead' and then the 'living' water over the body of Ivan

, he revives him. If one wishes, one can discern in this ritual echoes of ritual embalming followed by revival, as practised in the Egyptian cult of Anubis.

It is worth noting that in Rus', 'living'—'leaping'—water refers to rainwater, whilst 'dead' water refers to well water. In spring, rainwater revives the soil's fertility. Here we see a parallel with the reborn and dying god of fertility.

### ***HERMES TRISMEGISTUS***

In Greek mythology, the role of Anubis is fulfilled by Hermes. He is the guide of the souls of the dead ('psychopomp') to the realm of the dead (Hades). The very name Hermes indicates a semantic connection with the word

'herma' — a stone pillar or cairn, which in ancient times marked burial sites. Herms were also road signs, fetishes that guarded roads, borders, city gates and temples. It is quite interesting to compare **the** Greek '**herms**' with the Russian

'**terms**', which served the very same function and were associated with the god Chur (ancestor). Damaging 'herms', like 'terms' in Rus', was considered a terrible sacrilege against the ancestors.

According to legend, Hermes steals a herd of beautiful cows from Apollo, who personifies the sun. Since Hermes himself is the personification of the world of the dead, this myth can be considered identical to other Indo-European myths about the struggle between the supreme god and the king of the underworld, for example, the Russian Veles and Perun, or the Indian Vala and Indra.

However, the struggle between Hermes and Apollo did not end as fatally as it does in Russian and Indian mythology. The cunning Apollo 'traded' the cows for a lyre made by Hermes. As an added bonus to this deal, Apollo presented Hermes with his flute. From that time onwards, Hermes became the patron of shepherds and the guardian of the herd. By playing the flute given to him by Apollo, he summons cows and people from the world of the dead to the world of the living. Thanks to Hermes' 'patronage', the number of calves in the herds multiplies; the birth rate of children increases. Hermes was also venerated at the Anfesteria — a festival celebrating the awakening of spring and commemorating

the dead. We see here that, in terms of his functions, Hermes is analogous to the god of the ancient Rus' people — Veles.

Due to Hermes's proximity to the world of the dead, in late antiquity he came to be venerated under the name of Hermes Trismegistus ('three times great'). This denoted Hermes's role as the patron of the secret 'hermetic' sciences and arts, accessible only to those initiated into his mysteries.

### ***MERCURY, CUPID AND IVAN KUPALA***

In Roman mythology, Hermes is known as Mercury. Mercury is the guide of souls to the world of the dead. His name speaks of this quite clearly. In Russian, it is homophonous with words such as **'to fade' and 'death'**. Mercury is the patron of the arts and crafts, and a master of magic and astrology. Among other things, Mercury is the god of trade. His favour can increase profits. Mercury will also reveal the location of buried treasure to his devoted worshipper.

It is rather curious that a similar role—that of an assistant in discovering and digging up treasure—is fulfilled by the well-known Ivan Kupala. According to the old-style calendar, his day was celebrated on 23 June, which coincides with the summer solstice. On Ivan Kupala Day, in Belarusian villages, people would burn a doll called Mara. She personified death. The word 'Kupala' is homophonous with words such as **'to boil' and 'to bathe'**; furthermore, Kupala is related to Cupid — the Roman god of love. As researchers note, the word 'Cupid' is derived from the Latin word **'cupido'** — 'strong passion'. One does not need to know Latin to understand that 'cupido' means 'strong passion'. The Russian word 'kipet' in the sense of 'to desire passionately'—traces its origins back to the Indo-European root 'kir', which has the same meaning. Furthermore, the proper name Kupala is homophonous with the Russian word **'kapat' ('to drip')**, a connection reflected in the tradition of digging for buried treasure, as well as in the funeral rites associated with this day. The root 'kap' also points to the word **'kopit'** (to amass wealth). It is reasonable to assume that in ancient times, Ivan Kupala, like the Roman

Mercury, was the patron of trade. Evidently, Kupala, like the Greek Hermes, can be interpreted as the patron of the occult sciences and arts.

To this, one might add that a similar figure exists in Irish mythology — the god Lugh; in Gaelic it sounds like Lughus, and is pronounced by the Welsh as Lleu. Lleu has the epithet ‘skilful hand’. He is the patron of the arts and crafts. Caesar himself spoke of the cult of Mercury, which was similar to the cult of Lleu. The Welsh Lleu was a pupil of the seer and magician Gwydion, who passed on his secret knowledge to his disciple.

### ***FLIGHTS INTO THE NIGHT ON IVAN KUPALA***

According to folk beliefs, miracles occur and wishes come true on the night of Ivan Kupala. As A.N. Afanasiev notes:

‘The flights of sorcerers and witches to Bald Mountain, the frenzied dances around boiling cauldrons and the devil’s sacrificial altar coincide with the principal festivals marking the arrival of spring, Kolyada and Kupala... Consequently, the gatherings of sorcerers (sabbats, assemblies) must share features common to ancient pagan festivals... Thus, the Little Russians speak of gatherings of witches on Bald Mountain, situated on the left bank of the Dnieper, near Kyiv, that principal city of Ancient Rus’, where idols once stood and which was the centre of pagan worship. Hence, the witch herself is given the epithet ‘Kyiv’. The name ‘Lysa Hora’ is also found in other Slavic lands...’.

It is on Ivan Kupala that the astonishing transformations of people into animals take place. Thus, Afanasyev recounts a tale, prevalent in his time in Ukraine, about a soldier who spied on a witch preparing to fly to Lysaya Gora on the eve of Ivan Kupala. The witch undressed, smeared herself with a magical ointment and flew out through the chimney. Out of curiosity, the soldier did the same. He was seized by an unknown force and carried through the air to Bald Mountain. Frightened by the unprecedented sight of dancing witches and warlocks, the soldier hid behind a tree. But at that very moment, a witch appeared before him and asked:

‘What are you doing here? Hurry back, or our people will see you now and strangle you... Here’s a fine horse for you—run away!’ The soldier leapt onto the horse, which carried him home at breakneck speed. He tied the horse to the manger and went to sleep. In the morning, when he woke up, he went to the stable — and lo and behold, instead of a horse, a large log was tied to the manger.

### ***TERLICH-TERLICH...***

In Russian belief, witches always keep water, boiled with the ashes from the bonfire. Whenever she feels like flying to a gathering of devils, she sprinkles herself with this water and immediately soars into the air... On Kupala Night, the witch obtains the root of the terlich herb. When she fancies summoning someone to her, she boils this root in a pot and chants: ‘Terlich, terlich! Moero call call him!’ Unknown force lifts her beloved, and he races over the treetops with the speed of lightning. The more the potion boils, the faster he races... According to legend, in this case, one can easily crash into a tree trunk and hurt to death. According to popular belief, the magical concoction is prepared by adding a wolf’s heart, a cat’s claws and a snake. In an novel about the Solomoniya (17th century) tells of a demon ‘who came to her in a beastly form, shaggy, with claws, and lay down with her on her bed’. That same beast defiled Solomoniya through fornication and began to visit her in the guise of a handsome young man, not only on major feast days, but five or six times a month—

Clearly, in this tale we see echoes of ‘ancient times’, when the Fiery Serpent-Wolf flies to his mistress. Similar plots are found in ancient Indo-European literature.

Likewise, in ‘The Tale of Igor’s Campaign’ we read of Prince Vseslav, who had ‘a prophetic soul within his body’, and that he ‘roamed about at night as a wolf: from Kiev he roamed as far as the roosters’. Here, the transformation into a wolf does not yet carry the negative connotation that emerged later. One can also read in the bylina about the bogatyr Volkhv Vseslavovich that his name and exploits point to his magical

significance. When he was born, the entire Indian kingdom shook. From childhood, he learnt three arts of wisdom: to transform himself into a clear falcon, a grey wolf and a chestnut aurochs with golden horns. The epic goes on to recount that he could also transform himself into an ermine and a marashka.

### ON 'OKRUTNIKS' AND THE ENCHANTED

According to A.N. Afanasiev, echoes of ancient beliefs about shape-shifting can be seen not only on Kupala but also on Kalyada. Thus, in Russia, 'okrutniks' were the name given to mummers dressed in festive, shaggy animal skins or inside-out sheepskin coats. This belief dates back to ancient Indo-European myths about the heavenly gods, who in winter don animal skins and conceal their radiant forms beneath a beastly guise. With the arrival of spring, the heavenly gods are miraculously transformed — they cast off their skins and reveal their true, luminous countenance to people.

It is quite interesting that the meaning of the modern word '**okrutit'** (to turn) goes back to the word '**okrutnik**'; evidently, in days of yore, 'okrutit' meant to transform someone, against their will, into a wolf or some other beast. 'Okru' — in Old Russian — meant 'clothing'.

In winter, evil sorcerers and spirits cast wolf skins — 'okruuty' — upon the gods and force them to spend six months in the form of beasts. However, with the arrival of spring, the evil spells are broken and the beastly 'okru's' fall away.

Evidently, on the day of the winter solstice (Kolyada), sorcerers drape animal skins over the gods (recall the day of Karachun, as well as the word 'karachki'), and on the festival of the summer solstice (Kupala) these skins fall away.

A.N. Afanasyev writes: 'Involuntary transformation in the legends of Indo-European peoples is called bewitchment, enchantment, or a spell...'

The word '**spell**' is clearly related to the word 'Kolyada'. Then, in the word 'Kupala', one can also see an echo of the ritual of burying the skin,

burning it in the Kupala fire; and as well ritual  
**bathing, ablution and baptism with Kupala water.**

### ***‘DROWN’ OR ‘SPRINKLE’?***

We can see that this belief underwent a remarkable transformation during the Middle Ages. Witches and warlocks came to be blamed for droughts and the barrenness of the soil. Burning or drowning them was supposed to restore rain and fertility to the land. Such a custom—let us be frank, a barbaric one—the burning of people at the stake is akin to the revival of monstrous sacrifices. A substitution took place: instead of washing, they began to ‘drown’, and instead of burning animal skins, they began to burn people.

This attitude on the part of the authorities and the church was met with a reaction: the belief began to spread widely among the people that sorcerers and witches could turn people into beasts, and did so in revenge. Thus, according to A.N. Afanasyev, in Ukraine and Belarus, involuntary werewolves, forcibly transformed into animals, are called ‘vovkulaks’, because most often they are turned into wolves... It is not uncommon for these wretches to roam near their native village, and when they spot a person, they look at them with such pity, as if begging for help. Villagers have even noticed tears streaming from a vovkulak’s eyes in three streams. According to folklore, a man forcibly turned into a wolf will not touch a piece of raw meat, but will devour bread with great greed. Such beliefs were also prevalent in Northern Europe. The Scandinavians traditionally associate military campaigns—both their own and those of the enemy—with the presence of wolves. During the war between Sweden and Russia, a great many wolves multiplied near Kalmar. A rumour then spread through the surrounding villages and hamlets that these were conscripts who had gone off to war, transformed into wolves by the enemy, and had returned to their native lands in this guise...

### ***WHO IS HIDING UNDER THE WOLF’S SKIN?***

In days gone by, Russian peasants claimed that, when skinning a slain she-wolf or she-bear, they would sometimes find an old woman in a sarafane beneath the hide. There is a folk tale about how three wolves were killed during a hunting raid. When they began to skin them, they discovered that beneath one was a young groom, beneath another his bride, and beneath the third a musician with a violin.

It should be noted that there is no smoke without fire. Popular imagination, of course, adds something that was not there, but a slain she-wolf or she-bear with its skin flayed does indeed bear a distant resemblance to the body of a young woman. The same can be said of a male wolf or bear — without their skins, they bear a distant resemblance to the body of a man. Thus, bears and dogs have a heel on their feet, just like humans; bears have five toes on each foot, like humans, whilst wolves have only four. Furthermore, the testicles of carnivores—bears, wolves, and so on—are descended into the scrotum, just like in humans. The white layer of subcutaneous fat on wolves and bears once their skins have been removed evokes certain associations with the white human body.

Legends about mummers have transformed in a bizarre way into other legends. Thus, according to European folklore, on Christmas Day, crippled boys roam the towns and villages. They summon people to worship demons. Those who refuse to go with them of their own free will are beaten with magic rods and forcibly turned into werewolves. This transformation lasts only twelve days, after which the spell is broken and the person regains their former appearance. Their ability to speak and think rationally returns.

### ***‘ON THE FOREHEAD — THE RED SUN...’***

Evidently, these legends are an echo of ancient rites of transformation into wolves, lasting the entire festive week associated with the astronomical period of the winter solstice. In Ukraine, it was believed that a blow from that same ‘magic wand’ would remove the witchcraft from the bewitched people and turn them back into humans.

Perhaps these legends are linked to the ‘magic wand’ and to the name Chura — the patriarch, the progenitor — who, upon

, upon the utterance of his name, awakens them to true human life. In this connection, one might recall Russian fairy tales in which the touch of a magic wand lulls the heroes to sleep or causes them to turn to stone. And again, the touch of this wand, after some time, breaks the spell and brings them back to life.

Russian fairy tales depict the transformation of heroes into wolves and their subsequent liberation in a highly poetic manner. Here is how one tale tells of the cursed children:

‘If Prince Ivan were to marry me,’ says the fair maiden, ‘I would bear him sons — their legs knee-deep in gold, their arms elbow-deep in silver, a red sun on their foreheads, a bright moon on the back of their heads, and their braids studded with countless stars... their hair would be golden, with a pearl on every strand; when they took off their caps, they would illuminate everything around them with bright rays.’

Such omens, let us be frank, reveal the future sons to be bright gods, ‘representatives of the high heavens’ — as A.N. Afanasyev put it.

### ***THE QUEEN GAVE BIRTH TO THE SUN, THE MOON AND THE MORNING STAR***

It is quite curious that this Russian fairy tale corresponds to a Greek one, which explicitly states that the queen gave birth to the Sun, the Moon and the Morning Star. The birth of the Sun was celebrated at Kolyada. It is precisely then that it ‘turns’ towards summer. And in Russia, this turning point coincides with winter frosts, blizzards and snowstorms. The wicked sorceress Winter takes possession of the king’s children in his absence and turns them into wolf cubs. According to another version of the same tale, the witch substitutes the children. She turns them into stones and hides them in a deep dungeon, whilst placing wolf cubs in their cradles instead. Meanwhile, she persuades the tsar’s servants to place the wolf cubs and the tsarina in a tarred barrel, seal it up, and set it adrift on the blue sea — claiming that this was the absent tsar’s will. The barrel was washed ashore on a wondrous island, and a kind wizard transformed the wolf cubs into brothers. He did this in a most curious way: whilst the wolf cub brothers were asleep, he tied their tails together in a single strong knot and shouted in a booming voice: ‘It’s not time to sleep, it’s time

get up!’ The cubs sprang up in their sleep in different directions — their wolf skins flew off them in an instant. The wizard threw the skins into the fire and thereby restored the brothers’ human form.

### ***‘EKO DIVO...’***

The plot’s subsequent development is also quite intriguing. The tsar, returning after a long absence, finds neither his wife nor his children. His servants assure him that the tsarina had given birth to wolf cubs. And that, on his orders, they had sealed her in a barrel with pitch and cast her into the blue sea... And the treacherous witch passes off her own daughter as the tsar... And from there on, it’s almost exactly like A.S. Pushkin’s tale. Some beggars were passing through a distant land when they saw a river of milk flowing between banks of jelly. The beggars marvelled at the sight and told the tsar about this unheard-of wonder. The tsar was about to set off to see the wonder for himself, but his wife—the daughter of the wicked sorceress—would not let him go. ‘What a wonder they speak of,’ she said, ‘but my mother has something even better: a jug with seven spouts—no matter how much you eat or drink, it never runs dry.’ One of the brothers heard of this and immediately set off, stealing the coveted jug from the witch...

Once again, beggars came to the king and told him of the river of milk, the banks of jelly, and the jug with seven spouts. ‘What a marvel,’ said the king’s wife, ‘my mother has an even better one—a green garden, and in that garden, birds of paradise sing royal songs.’

And once again the beggars come to the king and speak of other wonders and  
‘the green garden, where birds of paradise sing royal songs’. ‘What a wonder,’ replies the witch’s daughter, ‘my mother has something even better: a magic mirror; if you look into it, you’ll see the whole world.’ And so, for the third time, the beggars come to the king and speak of the previous wonders and of the magic mirror.

The king could not bear it any longer; he set off himself to see everything with his own eyes, and saw his former wife, a beauty, and his three sons—handsome young men. And that was the end of the witch...

### ***THE WHITE SWAN SWIMS...***

As we can see, this folk tale bears a striking resemblance to A.S. Pushkin's 'The Tale of Tsar Saltan, of His Son, the Glorious and Mighty Warrior Prince Guidon Saltanovich, and of the Beautiful Princess Swan'. Pushkin's motif of the miraculous transformation has been slightly condensed into the following lines:

'The Tsarina gave birth  
one night To a child—  
neither son nor daughter;  
Not a mouse, nor a frog, But  
a creature unknown."

In Pushkin's version, however, the son, slandered by 'the weaver's wife, the cook, and the matchmaker Babaricha', is transformed first into a mosquito, then into a fly, then into a bumblebee, and miraculously makes his way across the sea. This sea, of course, is the barrier that separates the world of the living from the world of the dead. And Gvidon himself becomes the 'link' between the two worlds. In A.S. Pushkin's work, the transformation of the White Swan into the Tsarevna is depicted on a truly grand scale:

'Know that your destiny is  
near, For I am the Princess.  
There, flapping her wings, She  
flew over the waves  
And from on high she  
alighted on the shore,  
Landing in the bushes,  
She shook herself, brushed  
herself off And turned into a  
princess:  
The moon shines beneath the  
crescent, And a star burns  
upon her brow..."

As we can see, A.S. Pushkin's Princess is also marked by signs of cosmic dignity. Afanasyev draws certain mythological parallels in this regard. He says that the red sun or star on her forehead reminds him of Odin's eye, the moon at the nape of her neck  
— the crescent moon crowning Diana's head. And indeed, the light gods shed their animal and bird forms and become truly beautiful, as befits gods.

It is also quite curious that in Norse mythology there is a character — the magician and seer Gvidion. He is the teacher of Lleu, who, by all accounts, is the namesake of our Kupala. Perhaps A.S. Pushkin quite deliberately named his prince Gvidon... Lleu (Lug) gouged out Bálor's deadly eye in single combat... Gvidon stings his hated aunts in the eye.

### ***THE LITTLE RED FLOWER***

The power of sorcery transforms fairy-tale characters into various animals, not just wolves. These include bears, horses, lynxes, goats, rams, snakes, frogs, magpies, ravens, and so on. In all these fairy-tale metamorphoses, the animal's pelt is of paramount importance. For instance, in Belarus, a were-toad is called a 'zhabalaka', and a were-cat is called a 'koshkalachen'. These words are formed in a similar way to the word 'vovkulak' and literally mean 'toad's hide' and 'cat's hide'. The werewolf can be saved by burning its skin. However, this must not be done prematurely. Otherwise, the hero may perish — and be sent to the realm of the dead, as happened to the Frog Princess.

In Russia, there were once tales of a mother turned into a lynx by a sorceress. The mother would secretly come to her orphaned child, transform into a beauty and breastfeed him, after which, unseen by anyone, she would flee into the forest. The beauty's husband noticed that the child was always well-fed and never cried. He lay in wait for the lynx and burnt her pelt in a fire when she came once more to feed the child. In doing so, he destroyed the beauty. She had only two days left to walk in the pelt before she could be freed from the spell. Here we see the same fairy-tale motif as in 'The Frog Princess'. Similar motifs regarding the duration of the spell are also found in the author's fairy tale 'The Scarlet Flower'. The 'The Scarlet Flower' itself symbolises a fern flower which, according to legend, blooms once a year — on Midsummer's Night — and points the way to a treasure with its fiery light...

### ***THE RENEWED MAN***

Experts link Kupala rituals to a central myth in Russian mythology. Perun frees the stolen cows and hurls bolts of lightning at Beles, who hides first in a tree hollow, then in a stone, then in a hare, then in a duck, and finally in a human. Perun's fiery lightning burns the tree and splits the rock. It then burns the animal skins. As a result, a transformed man appears, who, according to the myth, has 'a red sun on his forehead, a bright moon on the back of his head, and countless stars along his braids. Taking off his cap, he illuminates everything around him with bright rays.' (Thus, the radiance around the head is a very ancient symbol, testifying to the transformation of man.)

The renewed or 'New Man' appears before us as a kind of transformed Purusha (the first man). In his form we see a microcosm identical to the macrocosm. This kind of motif is found throughout Indo-European mythology. The transformed human is the God-Man. In appearance, he resembles, for example, Shiva—the creator of all that exists, who has a third eye (the sun) on his forehead and the moon in his hair; and the sacred river Ganges springs from his hair. Shiva himself appears before his devotees seated upon a tiger's skin, which in a sense points to his ability to shapeshift. Shiva is known as the patron of wild beasts.

It is quite interesting that, according to the Greek author Pausanias, Zeus's head has three eyes. The third eye on his forehead shines like the sun...

## Chapter 11. WHY IS THE DEVIL POWERFUL?

This chapter discusses the similarities between Dionysus and Kupala; it also explores what Dievas and Dievs have in common with Div and Dy. In this chapter, the reader will find the answer to the question of why the devil is powerful; the reader will also learn about the chief devil-fighter Rustam; as well as about the satyrs and Iblis; about the Welsh myth; about Satre — the Golden Age; about Sartaj and his sunstone; about Aladdin's lamp; about the leader of the Aryans, Yima, as well as the swan-geese; about the children of the sun; about Ivan Kupala, Kupavon and Apollo.

### *DIONYSUS RESEMBLES KUPALA*

In terms of his functions, Kupala resembles Dionysus — the Greek god of Thracian origin. According to myth, the mad Dionysus wandered for a long time through Syria and Egypt, before arriving in Phrygia, where the goddess Cybele healed him and initiated him into her orgiastic mysteries. After that, Dionysus set off for India. And only then did he come to Greece. The cult of Cybele (Kiveva, the Indian Mother, the Mother of the Gods) is fascinating in its own right. She appears surrounded by frenzied Corybantes and Curetes, wild lions and panthers. Her mere presence induces ecstasy and unbridled passion in her companions. She is the mistress of the mountains, forests and wild beasts.

Dionysus adopted much from his patroness. The processions of Dionysus, which were of an ecstatic nature, were attended by Bacchantes and satyrs. Seized by 'sacred' madness, they destroyed everything in their path; revelling in the blood of savage beasts they had torn apart, they drew crowds of men and women in their wake.

Dionysus himself, captured by pirates during his voyage to Greece, terrified his captors by transforming into a ferocious she-bear and a lion. The pirates themselves, who threw themselves into the sea in terror, were transformed by Dionysus into dolphins. Dionysus demonstrated his ability to transform into various animals on more than one occasion, for example into a bull and a goat. From the religious mysteries and rites dedicated to Dionysus emerged,

a theatrical style—tragedy. The Greek word *tragodia* literally means ‘song of the goats’.

Many scholars see many similarities between the figures of Shiva and Dionysus. These include ecstasy, unbridledness, patronage over wild beasts, and the ability to transform into animals. The orgiastic nature of the cult of Shiva is well known. It can be surmised, if one follows the account of the Greek myth literally, that Dionysus visited India alongside the Aryan tribes and returned from there to Greece. The name Dionysus appears on tablets inscribed with Cretan Linear Script ‘B’ as early as the 14th century BC. In Greece, the cult of Dionysus became established in the 8th–7th centuries BC.

### ***DIONYSUS, DIEVAS, DYVA, DIV, DYI...***

If we assume that the cult of Dionysus is very ancient, we can identify certain characteristics of Dionysus himself with the cult of the Lithuanian Dievas, the Latvian Dievs, the Prussian Deivs, the Old Irish Dia, as well as the Russian Div and the Indian Deva.

In ancient Indian mythology, the word ‘Deva’ denotes a broad class of gods. The word ‘**deva**’ itself is derived from the ancient Indo-European root ‘**div**’ — ‘to shine’. In the same mythology, the word ‘Devi’ means ‘goddess’ — the wife of the god Shiva. The cult of Devi is very ancient. It dates back to the ancient cult of the Great Mother of the Gods.

The Lithuanian Dievas — the god of the radiant sky — marries Deive. They have twins — two sons; in an older version of the myth, — a son and a daughter, who enter into an incestuous marriage. This motif is reflected in the myth of the heavenly wedding.

It is quite interesting that ‘our’ Kupala also enters into such a marriage with his sister Marja (Mara). We may surmise that the father of Ivan and Marja is Div, who is mentioned twice in ‘The Tale of Igor’s Campaign’. At first, Div ‘calls out’ from the top of the tree, and then descends — Div has already ‘crashed’ (*vrezalsya*) to Earth. There is no doubt that Div is the embodiment of the rising and setting sun. Ivan and Marya are thus the children of the sun.

In East Slavic mythology, another name for the sun god is known: Dyi. It is mentioned in an Old Russian interpolation in the South Slavic text \*The Journey of the Mother of God through the Torments\* and in manuscripts of 'The Tale of How the Pagans Worshipped Idols' ('Dyevo's Service'). The name Dyevo has also been found in three Novgorod Greek inscriptions written in cryptic script. Scholars identify the Old Russian names of the god Dyevo and Div with the ancient Indian god Dyaus.

Dyaus is the god of the radiant, diurnal sky. The zoomorphic manifestation of Dyaus is the bull-breeder, with an emphasised sexual function.

### ***THE DEVIL IN THE FLESH...***

It is not difficult to see that Dyaus, Dyi and other similar names bear a striking resemblance to the name familiar to us all — the Devil. It is possible that the name 'Devil' is a compound, consisting of two names — Dyaus and Vala.

According to ancient Indian mythology, Vala hides cows in his underground lair. Indra sends his divine dog Sarama in search of them, and she tracks down the cows. Indra destroys the cave and frees the cows. Darkness vanishes, and the goddess of dawn, Ushas (Horror), appears.

The name Vala (Vol) may have been derived from the name Veles (Volos). That is, of course, assuming that the name Veles itself is very ancient and dates back to the times of the Indo-European community. The combination of the names of Dyaus — the shining sun-filled sky — and Vala (Veles) — the king of the dead — could have been called **the Devil**.

Philologists maintain that Jewish beliefs played the smallest part in the formation of the image of the Devil. The compilers of the encyclopaedia 'Myths of the Peoples of the World' write that 'in their doctrine, Satan occupied a negligible and vague place'. Meanwhile, the image of Satan or the Devil in Indo-European mythology may have held a quite authoritative and respected place. The ancient Iranians went to great lengths to imbue this figure with demonic traits. Thus, it is known that the 'devs', 'daiva' (Avestan) or 'diva' (Persian) during the Indo-Iranian era

were regarded as deities by the communities. This same attitude towards them has been preserved in modern Indian mythology.

### ***THE GREATEST DEMON-SLAYER, RUSTAM***

As the compilers of ‘Myths of the Peoples of the World’ — a major academic publication — write:

‘...in the 5th century, the Iranian king Xerxes destroyed the sanctuaries of the Devas and imposed the cult of Ahura Mazda. Xerxes’ so-called “anti-Devic inscription” was also directed against the Devas. The Devas were declared to be “the spawn of evil thoughts and lies”. After this, legendary kings and heroes appear as dev-fighters. The chief dev-fighter is Rustam. The Devs hate humans, killing them or keeping them in dungeons in their lairs, devouring two people every day — for lunch and for dinner. They are unmoved by the pleas of their captives and respond to invocations in the name of God with blasphemies... In the folklore of the Iranian peoples, the Tajiks have preserved the image of the Devs as giants covered in fur, with sharp claws on their hands and feet, and terrifying beast-like faces. They live in their lairs (devlohs) inside the mountains. There they guard the earth’s treasures — precious metals and stones... In Armenian mythology, devs abduct beautiful women and rape them. In Georgian mythology, devs are engaged in livestock farming and hunting. They are zoomorphic, hairy and horned... In Dagestani mythology, according to one version of the myth, one of the devas was a sheep farmer; he would roast people who strayed into his cave alongside his game and eat them. But a hero came along who gouged out the sleeping monster’s eyes. The awakened Dev began to count his sheep by touch, but could not find the man clinging to the sheep’s fleece from below. And the hero made his way out of the cave. Similar myths are found in the mythology of the Turkic-speaking peoples of Central and South Asia, Kazakhstan, the Caucasus,

Western Siberia, the Volga region, the Gagauz,  
the Karachais, the Kazan and West Siberian Tatars,  
and the Bashkirs’.

### ***IS THE DEVIL POWERFUL?***

The former Indo-Iranian community split due to a conflict between settled farmers and herders. In one of the Avestan texts — the ‘Gathas’, attributed to Zarathustra, the life of nomads engaged in cattle raiding and plunder is condemned. It is said that the raiders slaughter livestock during orgiastic sacrifices. At the same time, the labour of settled herders is idealised, and later in the ‘Veda-Vadha’ — that of farmers as well: ‘He who sows grain sows righteousness’.

It is striking that the Dagestani myth of the deva bears a strong resemblance to the Greek myth of the one-eyed Cyclops, in whose cave Odysseus and his companions found themselves. Evidently, new ideas and new myths spread quite rapidly in times past. ‘The chief Georgian dev-slayer’ Rustam bears a strong resemblance to our Ruslan, celebrated by A.S. Pushkin, as well as to the hero-dev-slayer Soslan from the Ossetian epic...

The constant conflict between the settled farmers and herders of Iran and the Scythian-Saka nomads also brought about a change in mythology. Thus, the twins—a brother and sister who had entered into a forbidden relationship—were transformed into two twin brothers who were bitterly opposed to one another. One became the ‘spawn of hell’, the Devil himself (Angra Mainyu), whilst the other became Ahura Mazda — the spirit of light and justice. Thus, darkness was separated from light. It was recognised that light would triumph, and darkness would vanish. In the ‘Avesta’, the heavens were also divided: the realm of light—the domain of Ormazd (Ahura Mazda)—from the realm of darkness—the domain of Ahriman (Angra Mainyu). Thanks to Zoroaster’s reforms, the Vedic gods fell out of favour. Indra, the thunderer, became the chief demon leading the host of darkness. The camp of spiritual beings was divided into the adherents of Truth — the Arta — and the adherents of falsehood and obscurantism — the Dru.

This opposition (between the earthly and the heavenly) also affected man himself. Some of his qualities were declared to be the offspring of impurity and darkness, whilst others were deemed the offspring of light and truth. Man's world was divided into the pure—the spiritual—and the impure—the physical. It turned out that the spirits of good and evil had jointly ruled over mankind prior to Zoroaster's reform; man had no choice as to whom to serve. After Zoroaster's reform, man was granted the right to make a conscious choice between light and darkness, destruction and eternal life, paradise and hell...

### ***SATIRS AND IBIS***

It is not inconceivable that during this complex period the word 'Devil', as an amalgamation of ancient myths, acquired its negative connotation. Former adversaries—the God of Thunder and the King of the Dead—merged in the minds of the reformers to become a single spirit of darkness, the eternal adversary of God, Satan himself. The Indo-European root '**sat**'— 'to sow' suggests that Satan, in times past, was a god of fertility and light. It may be that the name of this hypothetical god is linked to Saturn—one of the ancient Indo-Roman gods, the god of the 'Golden Age'—as well as to the Babylonian god Sataran. Inscriptions referring to him as a deity witnessing Ishtar are found at Meslim (27th century BC).

It is likely that the Satyrs—in ancient Greek mythology, demons of fertility who, together with the Selenites, formed the retinue of Dionysus—also bear some relation to the modern-day Satan.

Another negative character resembles Satan: Shaitan. In Muslim mythology, this is one of the devil's names. He is also called ash-Shaitan. He dwells in unclean places, in graveyards. His sustenance consists of what is offered to him as a sacrifice—drink, entertainment, music...

Another name for ash-Shaytan is Iblis. This name bears a striking resemblance to a derogatory term for sexual intercourse, which has survived in the Russian language since ancient times. And indeed, what does Satan and his minions engage in? Precisely

this simple business. The word Shaitan also resonates with the word Shabash — a gathering of witches on Walpurgis Night. During this gathering, we might witness, if we so wished, the ‘miracles’ of transformation, the revelry of the flesh and people in a daze... In Akkadian mythology, there was a sun god named Shamash. In its original form, ‘shabash’ meant worship of the sun!

### **WALLIAN MYTH**

And Ibu Pertivi has a particularly interesting name in the Hindu mythology of Western Indonesia and Malaysia: Mother Earth — the embodiment of the earth’s fruitful, life-giving forces. According to Balinese mythology (the island of Bali, Indonesia), Ibu Pertivi was created by the god Batara Kala, which we can interpret quite freely in English as ‘Sun Father’. The great ‘first’ Mother Earth gave birth to the great hero Boma, the liberator of mankind. Ibu Pertivi herself is considered the embodiment of Dewi Sri. Once again, here we see the familiar word Dewi...

How far the influence of the Indo-European community can extend!

As for the word ‘Iblis’, one can hear in it the Russian word **‘blest’**, in addition to the folk exclamation **‘eb’**. Evidently, in the bygone days of the Indo-European community, the word Iblis, or a word similar in sound, was used to denote a respected ancestor — the head of the family. We find remnants of this attitude towards the word in the particle **‘ibn’**, for example, Ibn-Hasan. This is how, in the East, a respected person, the head of a large family, is traditionally addressed.

Of course, nowadays it is not customary to flaunt one’s sexual exploits. However, in days gone by, the opposite was true. We find a vestige of this today on the islands of Indonesia. The head of the family, whilst receiving congratulations on the birth of another child, reclines on a high bed and displays his... penis to the guests. In doing so, he emphasises his procreative capabilities. One must assume that such a strange custom was brought to Indonesia by the Indo-Europeans... It cannot be ruled out that they gave the island the name Bali. This name bears a suspicious resemblance to the name of the ancient god Bala.

### ***SATRE: THE GOLDEN AGE***

As for the ‘terrible’ word Satan, in the bygone days of the unity of the Indo-European community it could have denoted the Sun. It is no coincidence that in India the first epoch is called Satya Yuga — the ‘Golden Age’. This was the very same legendary ‘Golden Age’ of which Lenin said that it never existed. The leader of the world proletariat put it in such terms that ‘fairy tales about the Golden Age’ were invented by priests; there was no ‘Golden Age’ at all — ancient people were ‘crushed’ by back-breaking labour and led a miserable existence... Evidently, ancient people were waiting for Lenin to come and free them from their back-breaking labour.

Perhaps the first to say that humanity knew no a ‘Golden Age’ was Zarathustra. He called on the people to work, to repel enemy raids, to obey their king in all things; and when the enemy was defeated and destroyed, the ‘Golden Age’ would dawn. Thus, the ‘religion of labour’ and ‘war to the bitter end’ were by no means invented by socialists and communists.

The Indo-European root ‘sat’ means more than just ‘to sow’. In Etruscan mythology, for instance, there is a deity named Satre, whose name is associated with the concept of the ‘Golden Age’—an era of abundance and universal equality. On a bronze liver model from Piacenza, this god’s name is inscribed right at the centre. In Roman mythology, the deity Satre corresponds to Saturn. A carnival-style festival held on 17 December — the Saturnalia — was dedicated to him. During this festival, a jocular ‘King of the Saturnalia’ was elected, and people exchanged gifts—lamps with burning flames. This festival was seen as a commemoration of the ‘Golden Age’ of universal brotherhood and abundance, when the gods visited mortals and vice versa.

### ***SARTADJIT AND THE SUNSTONE***

In Indian mythology, there is an interesting character named Sartajit, which can be translated as ‘the all-conquering one’. Sartajit received a magical stone, the Siamantaka, as a gift from the Sun God. For a virtuous person who revered the Sun God, this stone was an inexhaustible source of gold; it also served as protection against all manner of misfortune. However, the stone fell into the hands of wild beasts — a lion, the king of bears. In the end, the stone returned to its owner... All the adventures ended with a happy heavenly wedding.

This legend of the sunstone resembles the Tibetan legend of the Chintamani stone, as well as, to a greater extent, the folk tales of various peoples. The hero’s journey to the sun in search of a magical gift is described in many fairy tales and myths, for example, P.P. Ershov’s ‘The Little Humpbacked Horse’.

Let us recall Hans Christian Andersen’s fairy tale ‘The Tinderbox’. In this tale, it is not a stone that features, but a lamp — a tinderbox. Its owner receives as much gold as he wishes. Fierce dogs bring him pouches of gold and also carry out various tasks for him. The three ferocious dogs with terrifying muzzles are, evidently, ‘guardians’ of the realm of the dead, a sort of metaphor for the Greek Cerberus — the three-headed dog guarding the entrance to the underworld. The ‘soldier’ from

‘Ognyva’ deals with the ferocious dogs very simply — he ties them to the witch’s apron. Orpheus, who has gone in search of Eurydice to the realm of the dead, enchants Cerberus with his playing and singing.

The ‘soldier’s’ story ends in a wedding. The witch is chopped to pieces, and the bride’s wicked parents are torn to pieces by the dogs.

Orpheus is less fortunate — overcome by doubt, he looked back, and his wife remained in the realm of the dead for ever.

### ***ALADDIN’S LAMP***

This fairy tale by E.S. Andersen is very reminiscent of another, this time an Arabian tale, from the collection ‘One Thousand and One Nights’. At the insistence of an evil sorcerer, Aladdin descends into a dungeon, where he sees many precious stones. However, the sorcerer asks Aladdin to fetch not the precious stones, but a lamp that burns with a bright

light. The evil sorcerer seizes the lamp. Aladdin's life is in danger. But all the troubles are easily overcome with the help of the genie. The story ends with his marriage to the king's daughter.

Thus, we see that in all three tales—the Indian, the Arabian and Andersen's—the same plot is essentially present. The hero retrieves a lamp, a 'flint' or

'sunstone'. Personally, it seems to me that these tales all stem equally from a ritual performed by our distant ancestors on the day of the winter solstice, when the day is at its shortest and the sun hides in the 'underworld dungeon'. The hero rescues the sun (fire), or its embodiment — the sunstone. The story culminates in a heavenly wedding, which is celebrated on the day of the summer solstice, the longest day of the year... Gold and precious stones act as a sort of fairy-tale equivalent of the sun.

Indeed, the word 'sun' and the word 'gold' are not as far apart as they might seem at first glance. Both contain the root 'sol' – 'zol'. The ancient name for gold — 'zlato' (gold-silver) — brings these two words closer together. And even now, many people say, when showering their loved ones with praise, 'my little goldie', which sounds similar to the word 'sun'.

It is clear that in days gone by, epithets such as 'light-faced', 'sun-faced', 'moon-faced' were used to honour outstanding kings. This is evident, if only from a word such as 'sultan'. In India, they say 'sathu' when referring to a holy hermit. And indeed, the Russian word 'svyatoy' (holy) points to the light emanating from a benevolent person... The expression 'you are the salt of the earth' can be interpreted as 'you are the sun of the earth'. Thus, likening a person to the sun takes us back to an ancient Indo-European tradition. The word 'Satan' was perceived quite differently in days gone by...

And so Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin's 'The Tale of Tsar Saltan...' takes us back to this ancient tradition. Tsar Saltan is none other than the sun god, who has lost his wife. He finds her again thanks to his son, and the forces of darkness retreat.

#### ***HOW HE WAS STRIPPED OF HIS ROYAL DIGNITY***

The story of twins — the children of the sun — is widespread throughout Indo-European mythology. Thus, in ancient Iranian mythology, these are the brother Yima and his sister Yimak. Yima is portrayed as the creator of the benefits of civilisation, a cultural hero and the ruler of the world during the thousand-year Golden Age. During his reign, there was no death, old age, illness or vice on Earth. Etymologically, his name is interpreted as ‘twin’ or ‘double’. Yima performs sacrifices on the sacred mountain of Khukarya in order to gain power ‘over gods and men’. He marries his sister — the daughter of the sun — and begets humanity. Thus, Yima and his divine consort and sister, Yimak, possess all the characteristics of the divine ancestors of mankind who ruled during the the ‘Golden Age’.

However, the radiant image of the Forefather of mankind subsequently fades. As the compilers of ‘Myths of the Peoples of the World’ write:

“The image of Yima—the bestower of earthly blessings and physical immortality — came to be contrasted with the prophet—the reformer of the faith, the herald of spiritual immortality—Zoroaster. The orthodox priesthood’s desire to discredit Yima clearly testifies to his pre-eminent role in the pre-Zoroastrian phase of the mythology’s existence. A quasi-historical myth arose concerning how the symbol of Yima’s royal dignity, the khvarno, flew away from him. The authors of the Zoroastrian text \*Zamya-Yast\* openly recount the transfer of the khvarno to Zarathustra.

As a result of Yima’s reform, the son of the sun was sent into ‘exile’ to the underworld, where he became king of the dead. Yima acquired four fierce hounds as his servants, who roam among the living, seeking out their prey to drag them into the realm of the dead.

### ***YIMA AND THE NAME***

It is quite curious that in West Semitic mythology there is a god named Yammu, the embodiment of the evil principle and lord of the water element. His appearance is accompanied by monsters and dragons, as well as Leviathan. Yammu is portrayed as the sworn enemy of Baal. In Jewish

pre-Jewish mythology, Yammu claimed supreme authority over the gods; the gods were forced to pay him tribute until Yahweh (Yahweh) defeated him. Evidently, Yammu possesses the qualities of immortality. He periodically rises from oblivion, and Yahweh once again casts him into the abyss... In Jewish mythology, one may, if one wishes, discern in Yammu the traits of the ancient Aryan deity Yima.

The very name of the deity Yima can be interpreted from the perspective of the Russian language using the words 'name', 'having' and 'my'. And how else would one describe a twin — 'he is mine'?

It is quite interesting that the ancient Iranian motif of the divine wedding of the 'children of the sun' coincides with the Russian fairy tale 'Ivan and Marya'. Marya seduces her twin brother Ivan, and as a result, both become outcasts. In another version, Ivan, in a fit of rage, kills his sister, but then repents and weeps bitterly over her body. However, the gods grant him a magical remedy—living and dead water—with which he revives his sister.

All these tales bear a striking resemblance to the ancient Egyptian myth of Osiris. The only difference is that the sister (Isis) revives her brother's reproductive organ and thus conceives the son Horus. The son avenges his father, who miraculously comes back to life and becomes king of the land of the dead. Isis is depicted in ancient Egyptian frescoes with a solar halo and horns on her head, indicating her 'solar' origin.

### ***BURNING IS NOT MANDATORY***

The Old Russian legend of Ivan Kupala has its counterpart in ancient Greek mythology. These are the well-known Apollo and his sister Artemis. The Russian researcher Yuri Petukhov devoted considerable effort and energy to proving the continuity of the cult of Apollo-Kuiala. At the time, he published an article entitled 'The Unshorn-Haired One' in 'Science and Religion'. In it, he quotes A.F. Losev, who in his 'Ancient Mythology...' writes that during the June festivals of Apollo, human sacrifices were made: 'a young man and a young woman, decked with garlands, were paraded round the city and then

burned them.” In this connection, Petukhov writes that among the Slavs, too, there are recorded customs of burning two dolls made of wheat straw — a male and a female. It cannot be ruled out that this is a real echo of actual sacrifices. Human bones have been found in ancient bonfires...

We may surmise that the young man and woman—a brother and sister—were also forced to engage in intimate relations before being sent to join their ‘forefathers’ on the pyre. In this case, the parallel with the myth of incestuous relations would be complete.

Were our ancestors really that heartless?

Personally, I don’t think so. They were warm-hearted, kind people, but they lived in a completely different world. They were guided by entirely different ideas. They believed that after death, a person entered the realm of the dead and was then reborn — born again on earth. Rituals that seem inhumane to us today were perceived by our ancestors as a necessary tribute to their divine progenitors — a brother and sister, the children of the sun god. Furthermore, it is quite possible that young people were cremated in accordance with the principle that incest was unacceptable. Yet, in an even earlier period, incest was actually encouraged. Let us recall, for instance, the incestuous marriages that were widespread amongst royal families in Egypt. Evidently, in ancient times, when ‘there were few people’, incest was not forbidden but encouraged; and no one would have thought of burning young people at the stake merely to perform a ritual.

## ***GOOSES AND SWANS***

Let us recall the Russian folk tale ‘The Geese-Swans’. In it, a brother and sister flee from the swans sent by Baba Yaga to pursue them. Baba Yaga wanted to roast them both. Their desire to escape from such an inhospitable hostess is entirely understandable. But what strange motive drives Baba Yaga herself? Why does she, that old hag, need so much human flesh?

Undoubtedly, this is a human sacrifice, not a desire to sample ‘human flesh’. Evidently, the brother and sister were to be

sacrificed on Midsummer's Day. The swan-geese set loose by Baba Yaga to give chase are then perceived as quite menacing — as messengers of death. They are akin to Odin's ferocious hounds, participating in a savage hunt for human souls. Let us recall here that Apollo too travels across the sky in a chariot drawn by swans. It is no coincidence that the Greeks called Apollo 'the great destroyer'. According to myth, Apollo sets off for the north in winter. It is quite possible that Apollo's chariot was 'drawn' by two swans — the souls of two slain individuals. If two young people were sacrificed every year on the day of the summer solstice, one would inevitably call the sun god Apollo 'the great destroyer'.

It seems to me that, in reality, Apollo sets off on his annual journey—not to the north, but to the afterlife. Apollo's almost constant companion is a wolf, and he himself is called

'Lycian', that is, wolf-like, capable of turning into a wolf. As we recall, the wolf is the constant companion of Ivan Tsarevich in Russian fairy tales. Furthermore, according to Greek myth, Apollo descends into Hades and returns. He is quite rightly called a 'seasonal god'...

### ***CHILDREN OF THE SUN***

Of course, in light of the above, there is a great temptation to call the wolf from Russian fairy tales 'Apollo', helping Ivan Tsarevich and Elena the Beautiful escape from the realm of death — the realm of Koschei the Immortal... But the role of the wolf as a messenger from the land of the dead could quite well be fulfilled by 'our' Kupala.

The wolf usually rescues the young characters of the fairy tale from the realm of gloom and darkness. But, evidently, he can also deliver these very same characters there. Such are, for example, the hounds of Yima or the hounds of the Wild Hunter. In this context, the hounds differ little from the wolf. The destructive role of death's messengers can also be seen in 'our' fairy tale

'The Goose-Swans'. The apple tree shelters the brother and sister with its branches, then a steep bank hides them, and then the oven allows them to take refuge in its belly. As a result, the brother and sister manage to avoid the sad

fate of being sacrificed. The apple tree bestows a magical apple upon the travellers, the bank — water, the oven — a magical pie — a loaf of bread, a symbol of the sun. And the oven itself is a symbol of the family hearth, the domestic fire, which possesses a purifying function. Thus, it can be said that the brother and sister have passed through fire, water and copper pipes. They have been in the fire and emerged unscathed. The sacrifice is called off, as it took place on a mental level. It was a rite of initiation — a second birth — so typical of members of the ‘higher’ castes in Indian society.

When, on Kupala, the sacred fire is kindled by friction, and then a doll, or two dolls—a male and a female, made of wheat straw—are burned, this serves to initiate the young people. By jumping into the bonfire in pairs and leaping out unscathed, without breaking their arms, the young people re-enact, as it were, the ancient myth of the children of the sun...

#### ***KUPALA KUPAVON APOLLO***

Y. Petukhov keenly observed the similarity between the rituals performed on the night of Ivan Kupala and those dedicated to Apollo. In his article, he also writes that

‘...in the lands of Skolotoye, archaeologists have found swan figures carved into the ground near huge bonfires. The helmet of Kupavon, an ally of Aeneas—one of Troy’s principal defenders—is adorned with swan feathers, and Kupavon’s father, Kiki, was a man transformed into a swan’.

It should also be noted that this entire Greek story of the Trojan War, which broke out because of Helen of Troy; her abduction by the young Paris and her rescue, bears a resemblance to the Russian fairy tale about Helen the Beautiful. As we know, Troy was discovered thanks to Schliemann, and there is no reason to doubt that the Trojan War is not a fiction. Nevertheless, this real war could have been ‘adapted’ to fit the ancient myth... Sometimes things happen in life that have already been described in myths.

This is precisely what Y. Petukhov writes about:

‘...But Kupavon is not merely the leader of the Veneti. In northern Italy, the cult of the deity Kupavon, similar to the Slavic cult of Kupala, persisted for a long time. Geographically, it lies between the regions of worship of Kupala and Apollo, at a connecting centre on the route of the Hyperborean gifts. And to the ear, Kupavon is something of a cross between Kupala and Apollo...”.

Personally, I associate the name Kupala with **the** shining **dome** of the sky, with Kupala rituals, when excited young people **bathe** in the river. Shedding one’s clothes during ablutions is akin to shedding one’s skin. All the more so given that, in the past, clothing—or at least parts of it—was made from animal hides. I’d rather not think that my ancestors associated Kupala with **burning** on a pyre and **burying** bones... Although, of course, one cannot rule this out entirely...

## Chapter 12. WHAT THEY DID ON LYSYI HILL

In this chapter, the reader will learn whether people were baptised with water on Ivan Kupala Day; about the floating island of Asteria; Apollo's Wolf's Tooth; as well as what was 'boiling' on Kupala Day; about boiling cauldrons; about damask steel knives; about the 'well-developed' Zoroastrianism in Russian fairy tales; about what devils lurk in still waters; about how it is hard to build but easy to destroy; about the 'eternal fire' of Cappadocia; about St George the Dragon Slayer; about Yegory, the lord of wolves; about how the idol of Apollo was 'shattered'; where the Etruscans lived; the profession of the magi...

### ***WERE PEOPLE BAPTISED WITH WATER ON KUPALA?***

I recall a lady with magnificent wheat-coloured hair who tried to convince me that the Slavs did not practise human sacrifice. Looking into her beautiful blue eyes, I so wanted to agree with her... However, Taylor's book *\*Primitive Culture\** is replete with a wide variety of evidence that human sacrifice was a common practice not only among the Slavs, but throughout Europe. For instance, in order to build a fortress, children were sacrificed at the foundations of the corner towers. It was believed that if this were not done, the fortress walls would collapse and the fortress would be captured by the enemy. Taylor describes how Slavic princes, when laying the foundations of a town, would send their guards to a crossroads with orders to seize the first child they encountered. The child was sacrificed despite the parents' cries and pleas. The child's family was generously rewarded... Some of Taylor's writings cannot be read without a shudder, for he quotes documents from bygone eras written in officialese. Meanwhile, Russian folk tales describe the full depth of the protagonists' emotions, whilst the plot of some tales clearly and unambiguously points to the existence of human sacrifice.

My point is that our benevolent Russian deity, Ivan Kupala, may well have been perceived by our ancestors as anything but the embodiment of goodness. Indeed, there is much in common between Apollo and Kupala. In both cases, fire was produced by friction. During the festival, bonfires were lit. They were extinguished in water. In Rus', a burning wheel wrapped in straw was set afloat from the shore. Bouncing over the bumps and scattering showers of sparks in all directions, it plunged into the water with a hiss. 'Baptism' by water was one of the key elements of the Kupala ritual.

### ***THE FLOATING ISLAND OF ASTERIA***

It is likely that the day of Apollo was celebrated in a similar manner. Apollo is referred to as Hyperborean. In fact, according to legend, he was born, together with his twin sister Artemis, on the floating island of Asteria beneath a spreading tree...

One might think that the people who worshipped Apollo lived a long way from the Russian North. Yet a marvellous floating island had been constructed on the Solovki Islands. Soil was piled onto a platform of thick logs and trees were planted. At Easter, this island floated upon the waves of the lake, pulled by a rope wound onto a winch by two monks in the corner tower of the Solovetsky Monastery. Lights were lit on the island, and Easter candles burned. The 'Fiery Island' slowly approached the monastery walls to the sound of ringing bells and choral singing. The abbot of the monastery, surrounded by his clergy, descended from the island onto 'dry land'. People flocked to Solovki from all over Russia to witness this 'miracle'. This island could still be seen back in Soviet times. Deprived of propulsion, it drifted peacefully at the mercy of the waves and wind, along with the stunted birch trees that had literally grown into the logs...

Personally, I see a certain similarity between this man-made floating island and the legend of the miraculous birth of the sun god.

Apollo, the shepherd and guardian of flocks. All the pastoral scenes in medieval European painting, in one way or another, allude to him in an allegorical form. Indeed, the idea of the good shepherd, tending people as if they were sheep, appears to have arisen not without the influence of the cult of Apollo.

## ***APOLLO'S WOLF-LIKE SNARL***

It is believed that the cult of Apollo came to Greece from Asia Minor. The most ancient image of Apollo is characterised by the traits of a dying and resurrecting god. Apollo is the patron of shepherding and agriculture. Apollo is zoomorphic; he takes the forms of a wolf, a raven and a mouse. Therefore, there is nothing objectionable in considering the wolf, the raven and the mouse—characters from Russian fairy tales—to be embodiments of Apollo...

As experts note, after the 7th century BC, the images and cults of Apollo and Dionysus began to converge. According to reports, orgies were held in honour of both of them on Mount Parnassus. Worshippers of Apollo began to adorn themselves with ivy and bunches of grapes, just like the worshippers of Dionysus. Gradually, Apollo's zoomorphic nature faded away, and he came to be depicted as the patron of the arts and morality. He appeared in the form of a handsome young shepherd.

The zoomorphic 'wolf' image recedes into the past. Apollo's connection with the underworld fades away...

It is through Russian folk tales that the image of the original Apollo has been preserved for us amidst such a transformation. The figure of the wolf as a folkloric character comes closest to this original image. Of course, Apollo was known by a different name in Russia. Perhaps as Kupala, or perhaps in some similar form.

It is quite interesting that the Romans, in addition to the deity Kupavon, who bore the traits of Apollo, also had other pastoral deities. Thus, ancient authors tell us of Palas (with the stress on the first syllable). Dedications to this deity have survived; he is known in a 'dual' form — as a man and a woman. It is reported that shepherds have since ancient times offered sacrifices to 'both' Palese. It is possible that a ritual union between the twins was enacted. At the same time, large bonfires of sulphur and herbs were lit. Livestock were led between these bonfires to purify them of various impurities. At the same time, the people purified themselves by leaping over these bonfires. Such a rite was intended to ensure the fertility of the livestock and an abundance of children.

### WHAT WAS 'BOILING' ON KUPALA?

The word 'Palee' itself can be reinterpreted from the perspective of the Russian language. Firstly, 'Palee' sounds similar to 'Veles'. Furthermore, Veles is the god of livestock and the deity of shepherds...

The word 'Palee' echoes the familiar Russian word **'palit' (to burn)**. Rites of fumigating livestock against the machinations of evil spirits are well known. Such rites are very ancient and date back to the times of the Indo-European community.

There is a Greek interpretation of the name Palee. Greek mythology features the twins Paliki, born in Sicily. They have already been mentioned in this book. The Paliki are seasonal deities. They periodically hide in the bowels of the earth; evidently, this occurs in winter. And periodically they emerge into the light of day. This happens in the middle of summer. This is indicated by the very name **palin**; in Greek it means 'again', 'once more'. Boiling water is associated with the cult of the Paliki. Thus, Strabo reports that at Lake Paliki, hot water bursts forcefully from the bowels of the earth and returns there. The deities of the Paliki are associated with destructive functions. They punish those who break their oaths...

It is not inconceivable that in times past, people accused of crimes were indeed thrown into the hot geysers near Mount Etna. It is not inconceivable that human sacrifices were also made there on the day of the summer solstice, during the festival of the Paliki.

You don't need to be a genius to spot the similarity in the pronunciation of two words, two names — Kupala and Paliki. Both deities are associated with the cult of fire. According to numerous accounts, on Kupala Day, huge cauldrons were set up on the sacred hill, in which water boiled. The carcasses of sacrificial animals were thrown into this water. The hides were burnt...

Thus, on Kupala, it seems that it was not only passions that were 'boiling'.

***‘THE BOILING CAULDRONS BOIL, THE BLUE STEEL KNIVES ARE SHARPENED’***

Evidently, Kupala rituals found their way into many folk tales. Let us recall, for example, the tale of little sister Alenushka and her little brother Ivanushka. It seems to me that this tale, to some extent, reflected a reality that once existed. At the same time, it also reflects the annual cycle — the changing of the seasons...

‘The wicked stepmother sent the sister and brother far away. They walk on, and the sun is beating down. Ivanushka wants to drink from a cow’s hoof, but Alenushka tells him: “Don’t drink, you’ll turn into a calf”... They walk on, and the sun is still beating down. Ivanushka wants to drink from a goat’s hoof, but Alenushka says to him: ‘Don’t drink, you’ll turn into a little goat’... They walk on, and the sun beats down even more fiercely than before. Ivanushka couldn’t stand it, ran ahead and drank from a sheep’s hoof, and in that very moment turned into a little black lamb...’

Clearly, this refers to the height of summer, the day of the summer solstice. From that day onwards, the sun begins to wane. The light fades, and the days grow shorter. It is as though the sun god were donning a black skin...

‘The four of them began to live together—father, stepmother, Alenushka and the little black lamb. Alenushka talks to her little brother and cares for him. The stepmother sees this and leads Alenushka to a forest pool, throws a stone around her neck and pushes her into the water... Alenushka lies at the bottom; seaweed has entangled her hair, sand has covered her arms and legs, and the stone lies like a heavy burden upon her chest. Ivanushka runs up to the pool and says to her: ‘The cauldrons are boiling furiously, the damascene knives are being sharpened; they want to kill me.’ And Alenushka replies to her brother from the deep: ‘I cannot rise, Ivanushka, my hands and feet are bound, seaweed has entangled my braids, and a stone lies on my chest, pulling me down...’

Clearly, this refers to the wintertime stillness of nature; to water that has become motionless. Alenushka is the personification of the element of water. At the same time, her brother Ivanushka personifies the element of fire. Father Sun rescues Alenushka from the forest pool — he melts the ice. The spell is broken, and her brother Ivanushka regains his former form — he sheds and burns his skin.

## ***HOW TO GRAB A MARE BY THE TAIL, OR ‘EVOLVED’ ZOROASTRIANISM***

In P.P. Ershov’s fairy tale *\*The Little Humpbacked Horse\**, I believe there is also a motif of Kupala rituals.

Someone began to trample the wheat at night. Wheat is a symbol of the sun. And it is not just anyone who is trampling it, but the sun mare. So Ivan the Fool, the only one of the three brothers to be quick-witted, grabs the mare by the tail and climbs onto her backwards. The mare carried Ivan the Fool over forests and mountains. Finally, she grew tired. Ivan demanded a ransom. And then

‘she gave birth to a little horse for him...’. The little humpbacked horse is not a horse at all; he looks more like a grey wolf — a servant of the realm of the dead. He serves Ivan faithfully. He teaches him wisdom and takes him in the blink of an eye first to the sun, then to the moon. Ivan the Fool gets everything—both the Firebird and the beautiful queen. But a severe trial awaits him—the Tsar orders him to jump into a boiling cauldron. Which he does, not without the little horse’s help. And he emerges from the cauldron transformed—as Ivan the Tsarevich. Here we see the motif of initiation, transformation, as well as the familiar motif of the changing seasons. The tsar, however, ‘jumped into the cauldron and was boiled to death’. Personally, I see in this fairy tale a certain motif of overcoming paganism. Here, the wise and worthy tsar takes the place of the old and unworthy one. Ivan the Fool, a peasant’s son, was not a tsar by birth, but becomes one thanks to the fact that he obeys in all things his wise advisor — the hunchbacked horse. Undoubtedly, the image of the horse conceals the deity itself, which has undertaken to help Ivan the Fool. It seems to me that this fairy tale is already strongly influenced by ‘developed’ Zoroastrianism. The peasant’s son is set in contrast to the hereditary aristocracy. God is with him! The sacrificer himself is offered up as a sacrifice—the old, haughty tsar, who habitually controls the fate of the people and does not engage in ‘self-improvement’.

## ***IS THE DEVIL IN THE QUIET DEEP?***

As for the Kupala cult, it is clear that in days gone by, religious ceremonies were held in many places, past

which we walk past out of habit today. For instance, not far from Moscow there is a railway station called 'Kupavna'. Why it has this name, I personally do not know. Perhaps some rituals associated with Ivan Kupala Day used to take place in these parts. Only this place is quite extraordinary. The forest there seems almost enchanted. And within it grow marvellous flowers known as 'kupavkas'. They are tight buds on green stems. They bloom a bright yellow colour towards the end of June. Just on Ivan Kupala Day. In Kupava, there is a round forest pond — the water in it is as still as a backwater, and the trees stand around it in a dark row as if enchanted. Who knows, perhaps such places are home to the Kupala spirits, which have 'survived' to the present day from pagan times.

Here is another example of this kind, but it is certain that religious rituals were performed at this site in ancient times. Not far from Sochi, in Matsesta, there is a stone in the forest. It is a massive boulder. Two stone seats have been carved into it, and there is a hollow on top of the stone. Historians say that human sacrifices were once performed on this rock. The two stone seats may have served as the final support for the young man and woman being sacrificed — a brother and sister...

### ***DESTROY, NOT BUILD...***

Today, the stone is covered with various inscriptions such as — 'Vasya was here', a date, a signature and the town Vasya came from. Tourists enjoy sitting on the stone chairs and taking photos as a souvenir. Among the locals, the stone has a 'bad' reputation; they call it the Circassian Stone. The locals prefer not to go near the stone.

At the top of the mountain, not far from the rock, lies a small, man-made lake which is clearly quite deep. The water in it is still, icy and as white as milk. There are no birds or animals to be seen anywhere. A small stream flows out of the lake; without a defined channel, it winds its way down the mountainside towards a menhir standing on the hill below — a boulder embedded in the ground. A green meadow surrounds the menhir, and trees grow at

the foot of the hill, encircling it on all sides. Before us is the 'classic' Bald Mountain, with a stone symbolising the phallus of the god of fertility. At the Adler Ethnographic Museum, they call all this a historical and cultural complex. However, the locals have taken over the area around the menhir for growing potatoes, surrounding the stone with impenetrable fences... So we were unable to get close to it...

'It's a good thing,' they told us at the museum, 'otherwise, with all sorts of people about, they might cause trouble — we're all good at destroying and breaking things, but not at building them.' Evidently, in days gone by, the entire 'complex' was used as a sanctuary for worshipping pagan gods. It is quite possible that Ivan Kupala or a similar festival was celebrated on this very spot.

### ***THE 'ETERNAL FLAME' OF CAPPADOCIA***

In eastern Asia Minor there is an amazing place — Cappadocia. Cappadocia is an amazing place — with its bizarre rock formations and an entire underground city, carved out by generations of mystics and monks. At times, the monumental stone formations jutting out of the ground resemble gigantic stone phalluses. This is probably why Cappadocia became a religious centre during the pagan era — a permanent venue for numerous religious rituals. These lands were home to sanctuaries dedicated to Apollo and Dionysus, and sacrifices were made here to the Great Mother, Cybele. Incidentally, the Russian swear word, still popular among the people to this day — sending someone to such-and-such a mother — may, in some surprising way, be linked to the cult of Cybele, the goddess of fertility, in whose honour mysteries and orgies were held in Asia Minor.

Why did people dig numerous labyrinths in Cappadocia over the centuries? This question is still a matter of debate. There is a view that the local population hid in the underground passages, which in some places reach seventeen levels (storeys) below ground, to escape invaders. Most likely, the underground passages had a religious significance. During the Zoroastrian period, an unquenchable 'eternal flame' burned in the underground temples of Cappadocia

an unquenchable 'eternal flame' burned. In earlier times, the Aryan gods were worshipped here.

According to Christian legend, it was in these very places that Saint George the Victorious performed his exploits in the 3rd century AD.

Today, these places are visited by countless tourists. They photograph the stone 'phalluses', descend into the underground chambers, and soar above Cappadocia in a hot-air balloon — in short, they admire 'nature'. But many are completely unaware of the grand religious mysteries that unfolded here several millennia ago. It is not inconceivable that the cults of Kupala, as well as Kupavon, Pales, Veles, Palikov, Apollo, and the cult of the Great Mother of the Gods, Cybele, etc., originated precisely here... Some scholars favour Asia Minor as the Indo-European cradle.

### ***GEORGE THE DRAGON-SLAYER***

Thus, it was in these parts, at the end of the 3rd century AD, that the glorious warrior St George the Victorious performed his military exploits. According to legend, St George the Victorious was born in Cappadocia and knew the local landmarks first-hand. Passing by a pagan town in Lebanon, St George learnt of a local dragon to which, according to an unwritten tradition, a young man and a young woman were sacrificed each spring. This dragon faithfully devoured its annual sacrifice until it was the turn of the king's daughter. St George, who had stopped to water his horse in the area, encountered this serpent-dragon and the princess who had been offered up to it. The battle was short-lived. St George gouged out the dragon's eye with his spear. In another, reinterpreted version of the myth, the dragon falls of its own accord at St George's feet and humbly awaits the decision on its fate. The king's daughter throws a rope around its neck and leads it into the city 'like the most obedient of dogs'. There, the city's ruler and the inhabitants listen attentively to St George's sermon, after which George strikes the dragon with his sword...

This plot bears a strong resemblance to pagan tales of Apollo's struggle with a serpent, as well as other tales of a thunder-god's struggle with his sworn enemy—a serpent—such as those of Perun and Veles...

The Crusaders, having visited the legendary homeland of St George, spread the fame of the dragon-slayer George throughout the Catholic world, which found expression in medieval chivalric literature. The Crusaders testified that during the storming of Jerusalem in 1099, St George had, in some inexplicable way, taken part in the battle, appearing at the head of the Crusader army as a knight with a red cross on a white horse... The legend of St George became the logical culmination of the entire courtly culture. In the 14th century, St George became the patron saint of England. From the 14th century onwards, the image of a horseman piercing a serpent with a lance became the coat of arms of Moscow.

#### ***YEGORIY — THE RULER OF WOLVES***

In Rus', the image of St George underwent a reinterpretation. As the compilers of *\*Myths of the Peoples of the World\** write:

'It appears that the Slavic peoples transferred certain traits of spring fertility deities, such as Yarila and Yarovit, onto St George, which may explain the folk variants of his name, such as Yuri, Yury, Yur (Ukrainian) and Ery (Belarusian). Russian peasants called St George the 'herd driver' and even the 'god of cattle'... By protecting livestock and people from wolves, George is regarded in Slavic folklore as the lord of wolves, which are sometimes referred to as his hounds. He also wards off snakes from humans and domestic animals, which is linked to his role as a snake-slayer (dragon-slayer).

As we can see, the image of St George to some extent incorporates the image of the very beings he fought against — logically, the leader of the wolves must be the 'chief' wolf, and the leader of the serpents and dragons must be the chief serpent and dragon.

In Rus', the spring festival of St George was celebrated on 23 April. On this day, livestock were taken out to pasture for the first time and the first spring lamb was slaughtered. In this ritual, one can see an echo

the sacrifices previously offered to the god of livestock. In Russia, special songs were sung on this day:

*'We walked round the field, calling out to Yegor... Yegor, you are our brave one..., save our livestock in the field and beyond the field, in the forest and beyond the forest, under the bright moon, under the red sun, from the ravenous wolf, from the ferocious bear, from the cunning beast.'*

Russian spiritual verses about 'Yegory the Brave' endow St Gregory with epic traits. He becomes the son of Sophia the Wise. He suffers imprisonment in an underground dungeon — 'in a deep cellar' — for his faith. Then, miraculously, he emerges into the light of day and travels across Rus', establishing Christianity. His three sisters, who remain steeped in paganism, appear before him in the guise of hairy shepherdesses from a pack of wolves. After baptism with water, the scabies falls from the sisters, and the pack of wolves now submits to Yegory himself. Here we see the motif of shedding the wolf's skin, so characteristic of paganism.

#### ***THE HEAD 'FUSED' WITH THE IMAGE OF THE DEITY***

It is quite interesting that the ritual driving of the sultan's horses out to pasture was scheduled precisely for 23 April. This rule was laid down in the court regulations of Ottoman Turkey. This day was marked as a seasonal turning point in the livestock-breeding calendar.

In Croatian ritual tradition, St George appears as the personification of life-giving spring — 'Zeleni Juraj'.

Muslim legends particularly emphasise that the saint died and came back to life three times in a miraculous manner during his torture. According to experts, this is a clear sign of a dying and resurrecting deity of fertility.

Experts also see the motif of martyrdom and 'life after death' in the saint's distinctive iconography. For instance, in one Byzantine icon, George is depicted standing in a prayerful pose with his severed head in his hands. An icon with a similar subject is also kept in the Historical Museum in Moscow.

Evidently, in Rus' there was a fusion of two divine figures — Yarila and Saint George. In popular understanding, Yarila

is conceived as a warrior on a white horse. In his hands he holds a human head — presumably his own. Legends about the ‘living’ head have, in a remarkable way, ‘merged’ with the image of Saint George and the archaic Yarila.

### ***ON HOW THE IDOL OF APOLLO WAS ‘DESTROYED’***

The Life of Saint George the Victorious (Egor) describes a scene in which the saint was led into a temple where everything had been prepared for a pagan sacrifice.

‘The saint approached the idol of Apollo, stretched out his hands towards it and asked the lifeless idol, as if it were alive: “Do you wish to accept a sacrifice from me, as a god?”’

As he spoke these words, the saint made the sign of the cross. The demon dwelling within the idol then cried out: ‘I am not a god, nor am I a god, nor is anyone like me. There is only the One whom you profess. We, however, are fallen angels who once served Him. Driven by envy, we lead people astray.’

The saint then said to the demon: ‘How dare you dwell here, when I, a servant of the true God, have come here?’

At these words of the saint, a clamour and wailing arose from the idols. Then they fell to the ground and were shattered.

Immediately the priests and many of the people, as if in a frenzy, rushed furiously at the saint, began to beat and bind him, and cried out to the king: ‘Kill this sorcerer, O king, kill him before he destroys us!’

Thus, Saint George ‘shattered’ not only the dragon, but also the ‘wolf-like’ idol of Apollo, whilst the saint himself became the ‘ruler’ of the wolves.

Just as Apollo, the sun god, sends arrows of light at his enemies, as Herodotus wrote, so too does Saint George ride forth on a white horse—a symbol of the sun—and strike down his enemies—the spawn of hell and the offspring of darkness. In Uccello’s painting *\*The Battle of St George and the Dragon\**, painted in the 1450s and housed in the National Gallery in London, St George is depicted as a medieval knight — in armour and armour plating. He pierces the dragon’s eye with a sharp and

long spear. The dragon, meanwhile, roars helplessly, its ‘wolf-like’ jaws. A rope has already been thrown round its neck, held by a submissive queen dressed in medieval fashion. Behind the figure of St George, a black cloud swirls, and at its very centre one can make out God the Father.

This scene, despite its unusual interpretation, undoubtedly refers to the motif of God the Thunderer, who struck his serpentine adversary in the eye with a mace of lightning. One might also recall another common motif — the struggle of the sun god against a dragon. For example, the Norse Lúg (Welsh Lleu) strikes the monstrous Balor in the eye with a magical spear.

### ***WHERE DID THE ETRUSCANS LIVE?***

It is known that the Hittites lived in Asia Minor two millennia before the birth of Christ. This people had a mythology very close to that of the Indo-Europeans... It is also suggested that the Etruscans—a people who arrived in Italy in the 13th century BC from some eastern country—may have lived in this region. The distinctly Eastern features of the Etruscans include the sacralisation of royal power, religious attributes such as the double-headed axe, and a complex cosmogony characteristic of Eastern monarchies.

In the Etruscans’ conception, the world consisted of the dome of the sky — the abode of the gods, the middle world — the realm of humans, and the underworld

— the realm of the dead. To facilitate the soul’s passage into the realm of the dead, the Etruscans built special underground passages and tunnels (mundus) beneath their settlements. It was in these underground chambers that mysteries were performed and sacrifices were offered to the gods of the underworld and the spirits of the dead.

The immortal gods reigned in the heavens. They conveyed their will to humans in the form of fiery lightning bolts. The art of interpreting lightning was one of the most honourable priestly professions. The priestly class in Etruria was divided into distinct castes. Some interpreted lightning, others dispersed the clouds, a third group performed sacrifices and made libations to the gods, whilst others sang hymns and praised the immortal gods.

There were special priests who offered prayers during the preparation of food and at mealtimes: priest-healers, priest-poets, priest-philosophers, priest-diviners, and so on. This system of priestly castes broadly corresponded to the Russian priestly system.

### ***THE PROFESSION OF THE VOLKHV***

In Rus', as is well known, there were volkhvs who were cloud-callers, who summoned rain during religious ceremonies, for example, on Ivan Kupala. There were also volkhvs who were 'charmners' (from the word 'bajat' (to speak)). These 'enchanters' literally 'enchanted' their listeners with tales and songs of times long past. It is likely that this is why the 'Tale of Igor's Campaign' mentions Bayan — the grandson of Veles. It is possible that the name Bayan was associated with the profession of the priestly class.

In addition, there were sorcerers-blasphemers (those who conducted rites for the dead). Perhaps this is the origin of such a character from the epic poetry as Koschei the Immortal. Everyone is familiar with the expression 'do not blaspheme!'.

In Rus', there were also sorcerers who were healers, sorcerers who were whisperers (from which the words 'wizard' and 'whispering old woman' derive), as well as sorcerers who were seers (from the verb 'vedati' – 'to know'). They were skilled in debates on philosophical and religious topics. There were also 'guardian' magicians, who protected people from misfortune and evil thoughts. These were skilled in the making of talismans and amulets. There were also 'diviners'—experts in love magic. People turned to them when they needed to conceive and give birth to a child successfully.

The similarities between the priestly 'castes' of the Etruscans and the Russians, of course, do not end there. The Etruscans also had a god named Velhans — the god of subterranean fire. This is the origin of the name of the Roman god Vulcan. However, the name Velhans is also similar in pronunciation to the name of the Russian god Veles, as well as to the word 'volkhv'. Most likely, in Etruscan mythology, Velhans was associated with the wolf, a well-known character in Russian fairy tales... Of course, the Etruscans surely told their own tales about the wolf.

## *APLU, APOLLO, KUPALA AND FUFLUNS*

The Etruscan god Aplu was identified with Apollo. He was a typical god of fertility, the guardian of herds and crops. The very name Aplu contains the well-known motif of **'fertilisation'**, as, incidentally, does the name Apollo — **'womb'**. This is also the origin of the words

**'kaplun' and 'kapat'**. This seasonal god would, as it were, 'bury' his virility until the following spring. Well, and from there it is not far at all to the name of 'our' god Kupala. Indeed, Kupala is a seasonal god. He lost his 'potency' after 'rolling about' to his heart's content on the day of the summer solstice. He seemed to 'bury' his reproductive organ until the following spring. The motif of ritual

'castration' was widespread in the ancient world. On the other hand, the male sexual organ was regarded as the embodiment of an independent generative force, separate, so to speak, from its owner. Let us recall Dionysus, whose symbol was the phallus. And let us also recall the motif of the dead (asleep) Osiris. Isis conceived a child by her brother, awakening his virility through magic. According to another version of the myth, Isis gathered the body parts of Osiris, scattered throughout Egypt, and buried them. The only thing she kept with her

was the phallus, with which she conceived and subsequently gave birth to her son Horus.

Thus, after a stormy night in his honour, Kupala lost his fertilising power and fell into a deep slumber until his next rebirth. One might say that he burned up in the heat of his passion, completely and utterly, yet like the Phoenix he was reborn from nothingness, young and strong, ready for amorous exploits.

In Etruscan mythology, Dionysus and Bacchus were corresponded to by a deity with the significant name Fufluns. Who knows whether the Russian word 'fuflo', which evidently originally denoted an inability to behave in a masculine manner, might be linked to the name of this Etruscan god?

Thus, Etruscan mythology provides us with ample food for thought regarding the shared destiny of the Italian and Russian peoples.

## Chapter 13.

# MIRACULOUS TRANSFORMATIONS

In this chapter, the reader will find a tale of how, in days of old, the elderly were bathed from a cart; of Triton the Water Spirit, Triton and Tretyak; and also of how heavy dew bodes well for a cucumber harvest. This chapter contains a tale of ill-fated love; it also tells of the two-faced Janus; the underground affairs of Yama; a fairy-tale transformation; the seven underground kings; the eight-headed drunken serpent; a feud between brothers; a dark tale; the goddess of fertility, Ishtar; and a very old story.

### *BATHING WITH A YOKE*

In Russia, according to V.I. Dal, there was a custom of bathing the elderly (kupati s tyagla) for general amusement, without undressing them, whilst they remained fully clothed. Afterwards, the elderly were relieved of their duties, so to speak, ‘sent off on a well-deserved rest’.

And even today, here and there, one can hear the jocular expression: ‘We’ll give Petrovich the boot’ – we’ll send him into retirement.

Most likely, this custom dates back to very ancient times, when old people were thrown into the water — to see whether they could swim out on their own or not. I cannot presume to judge the customs of those places, but even in the recent past, a custom persisted on the islands of Oceania: they would drive the elderly up a tree and then shake it — to see if they would fall or not. If they fell, the old man did not have long to live. Perhaps this, frankly speaking, monstrous practice was linked to the belief that an old man loses his virility — becomes impotent... And the old men were sent to the other world so that he might be reborn in this best of all worlds.

In the Smolensk Governorate, a **‘kupalnica’** was the name given to a fire in a field, and a **‘kup’** to a bonfire. On Kupala, people did indeed bathe and bathe the elderly, even if they did not wish to. On Kupala, bonfires were lit and fires were kindled in the fields.

In this way, on this day, water and fire seemed to come together. One might equate water with the sister, and the brother with fire... In the fairy tale about little Alenushka, her wicked stepmother pushes her into a deep pool with a stone around her neck — sacrificing her to the spring waters — whilst her little brother Ivanushka, in the guise of a sacrificial animal — a little lamb — the wicked stepmother demands be sacrificed to ‘fire’. Such fairy-tale plots date back to very ancient times, when the practice of human sacrifice was common.

### ***‘TRITA THE WATER SPIRIT’, TRETYAK, TRITON***

Many myths from various peoples tell of the custom of giving a beautiful maiden in marriage to the sea king. Such motifs are found in the Novgorod legend of Sadko and in the ballad of Stepan Razin, who ‘throws the princess into a surging wave’.

Sometimes the sea king looks like a real dragon — a sea monster. He does not take the beauty as his wife, but devours her — the Greek myth of Perseus and Andromeda. But there is always a radiant hero who frees the queen and slays the sea monster.

It would appear that in Rus’, as elsewhere, there was a figure analogous to the Greek Poseidon or Neptune. Human sacrifices were offered to him on the day of the ‘opening of the waters’, so that he might not drown fishermen or drag away bathers. Once the sacrifice had been made (or its substitute in the form of the Kupala and Mara dolls), people were allowed to bathe in rivers and lakes. In later times, 23 June was known as the day of St Agrippina or Agraphena the Bather. This marked the official opening of the bathing season.

Evidently, Rus’ had its own water king. His image was transformed into that of the vodianoy — the guardian of water bodies. In fairy tales, his name is Ivan Vodovich or Ivan the Third, Tretyak. This name is no coincidence; Tretyak is the master of the third world (heavenly, earthly, aquatic or subterranean). Our ancestors associated the element of water with the world of the dead. Hence, the water spirit’s retinue consists of mermaids, kikimoras and other undead creatures.

However, after Ivan Tsarevich does him a favour, Tretyak agrees to help him. With his help, Ivan Tsarevich descends into the underworld and obtains there untold riches: gold and silver, as well as the water of life. With the help of the water of life, he overcomes death and brings his bride back to life.

The word Tretyak itself is related to the Greek Triton — lord of the stream — as well as the ancient Indian *Trita Aptya* — ‘Trita the Water-God’. The name Trita likely means **‘third’**—the third underworld, the third brother; it derives from the Indo-European root ‘trit’. It is not impossible that the Old Russian Tretyak had three heads...

So, it turns out, this is the one whom the brave Yegor, in the guise of a dragon, slew when he decided to water his horse — the three-headed king of the underworld...

#### HEAVY DEW FOR A GOOD CUCUMBER HARVEST

Ancient images from tales and legends come to life before our eyes when we connect with our folk heritage. In myths and fairy tales, water is conceived not merely as water, but as a symbol of the feminine principle. Fire and water give rise to life.

In an ancient Jewish legend, the creation of the world is depicted as a bird, symbolising water, which incubates an egg... Thus, the metaphor of the earth rising from the primordial ocean takes on a different meaning. The earth appears as a marvellous great egg, emerging from the primordial waters of the cosmos. The marital union of the sky, as the masculine principle, and the earth or water, as the feminine, is also widespread in Indo-European mythology.

The fruitful ‘masculine’ seed, falling upon the earth as rain, causes the earth to bear fruit. This metaphor is characteristic both of the Canaanite-Phoenician god Balu (Baal-Haddad) and of the Old Russian Perun...

Ritual ablution thus symbolises the act of nature’s rebirth, whilst on a human level it represents a second birth. It is no coincidence that baptismal fonts are found in many churches and places of worship belonging to a wide variety of denominations. Undoubtedly, **baptismal fonts—or bathing places**—were also present in pagan shrines. There is

even a certain resonance in the pronunciation of the words **‘kupalnia’** and **‘kumirnia’**. Which, of course, as you may have already guessed, is related to the name of Ivan Kupala. Perhaps, in the ancient shrines dedicated to the god of water as the embodiment of the life-giving principle, statues of Kupala were erected? Perhaps... And the font itself, understood as a sacred bathing pool, was dedicated to the god. Presumably, whilst bathing in such sacred pools, people believed that this would help them to have many children...

Proverbs and sayings, as well as folk omens, indirectly attest to Kupala’s connection with childbirth: ‘Heavy dew on Ivan’s Day bodes well for the cucumber harvest’.

### ***ON UNFORTUNATE LOVE***

A Russian legend about Ivan and Marya tells of how, in a distant hamlet, a young man met a girl. He fell in love with her. They were young, so they got married. A month into their marriage, Marya told her husband that she had dreamt of her parents and that she simply had to go and visit her dear mother and father. One thing led to another, and it turned out that Marya and Ivan were from the same village, the same hamlet and the same family, and that they shared the same parents. ‘What have we done?’ exclaimed Ivan, ‘neither our parents, nor the people, nor God will forgive us!’

The next morning they fled the town, and God only knows where they went...

This legend undoubtedly represents a later version of the myth. In other, earlier versions, the sister persuades her brother to marry her. The brother, however, refuses and kills his sister. He then repents of his deed, is tormented by guilt, and takes his own life by throwing himself into the river from a high bank.

As we can see, this is a typical tale of ‘unfortunate’ love, somewhat reminiscent of Shakespeare’s ‘Romeo and Juliet’. The only difference is that in Shakespeare’s version, the feud between the two families turns the young lovers into outcasts.

In Baltic mythology, in its more ancient part, there are a brother and a sister—the children of the sun deity. They correspond

the Russian Ivan and Marya. Then the brother ‘splits in two’... and in later myths and legends, two brothers appear. Thus, in Latvian folk poetry, there is a tale of how two twin brothers, the children of Dievas, fall in love with their sister — *Saules meita* —

‘daughter of the sun’ (the name **Saules** is homophonous with the Russian word **for ‘sun’**). They take turns carrying their sister across the sky in an apple-tree boat, light two fires on the sea, and ride to her home on two horses.

Thus, the two horses become a symbol of the twin brothers, rivals for their sister’s hand. This motif is found throughout Indo-European mythology, particularly in the depiction of two horses on the roofs of log cabins.

### *THE TWO-FACED JANUS*

In Latvian mythology, the twin brothers appear as Yumis, the deity of a bountiful harvest. The word ‘yumis’ also means ‘twins’ — conjoined ears of wheat, potato tubers, apples, nuts...

Yumis has a wife — ‘Mother Grain’ or ‘Wheat Woman’ Yumala (the name of the town Jūrmala presumably derives from this). This strange couple have a child — Yumalen.

It is clear that in Roman mythology, the divine twin brothers, the Umis, correspond to the deity Janus. In the Salian Hymn, Janus is portrayed as the demiurge, the creator of the world, who turns its axis. In the Roman mysteries, he was referred to as the ‘king of sacred rites’, first among the priests. Janus was usually depicted with two faces, looking in different directions. Hence the expression ‘two-faced Janus’. In Rome, a double arch was dedicated to Janus, one gate of which opened in times of peace; when war was declared, this gate closed and another opened — the ‘gate of war’. In general, Janus is the most ancient deity of entrances and exits; he was depicted with a multitude of keys or fingers (365), corresponding to the number of days in the year. When addressing the gods, the name of Janus was mentioned first. Evidently, he opened the gates to heaven and closed them, as well as the gates to the underworld... Perhaps the priestly practice of mentioning the name of Janus first during

worship has also entered modern vocabulary. Before we say our own name, we say or hear the word 'name'. Evidently, this very word once denoted the name of the first deity, the progenitor of mankind: Ymir, Yumis, Yimak, Yama, etc.

### ***THE UNDERWORLD AFFAIRS OF YAMA***

Ancient Indian mythology also provides us with ample scope for analogies of this kind. The Indo-Aryans revered Yama, the lord of the realm of the dead. He is the son of the solar deity Vivasvat. The *\*Rigveda\** contains a dialogue between twins—Yama and his sister Yami—in which the sister persuades her brother to commit incest in order to produce offspring. However, Yama refuses. Perhaps this is precisely why he became the first human to die. Prior to this, the Earth was inhabited by immortal gods. By virtue of his primacy, he became the king of the dead — the 'gatherer of souls'. Since then, Yama has been preparing 'places of rest' for the departed in his underworld. According to the myth, Yama sought immortality in his struggle against his enemies, and it seems he obtained it on the condition of a 'lifelong' stay in the realm of the dead. Now, in his underground refuge, Yama grants people respite from the troubles and cares of the world, to which they have grown accustomed during their short lives. To ensure that no one can enter the realm of the dead before their time, the entrance to the underworld is guarded by two four-eyed hounds. At night, these hounds roam the world of the living, on the lookout for their prey.

Yama sits upon a regal throne, clad in a red robe, in the midst of a magnificent palace in the underground city of Yamapura, as yet another deceased soul is brought before him. Yama listens to an account of all the good and evil deeds committed on earth, and thereafter decides the soul's future fate. He commands that the soul be settled either in the paradise of the ancestors, alongside its virtuous forebears, or sent to one of the hellish realms, where the soul will be tormented and suffer until it atones for its deeds, or be reborn on earth in a different physical form, depending on its karma.

Yama has assistants—the gods: Kala (time), Antaka (the slayer) and Mrityu (death). The names of these gods may be

understood by a Russian person even without translation.

Yama, apart from his sister Yami, whose advances he rejected, has a full brother named Manu. Manu is the 'king of mankind'. It would appear that he was not quite so categorical regarding incest (the sin of consanguinity), and thus a generation of people came into being, of whom you and I are the descendants.

### ***FAIRYTALE TRANSFORMATION***

We find a similar plot in the ancient Greek legend of the Dioscuri — the sons of Zeus. The name of Zeus, the god of thunder, is phonetically similar to the name of the god of the shining sky, Dievs (Russian: Divo-divnoe).

The twin brothers were not equal in status. One of them—Polydeuces—was considered immortal, whilst the other—Castor—was mortal. This links this Greek myth to the Indian one. The twins brought their sister Helen, who had been abducted by Theseus, back to her homeland. A similar plot can be found in the legends of other peoples.

In general, the number of male twins can be tripled. Thus, in Indian mythology, there are two twin brothers, the Ashvins. One is the son of the night, the other the son of the dawn. Both are depicted as 'horse-riders', and they compete for the hand of their sister — the 'daughter of the sun'. This motif links them to the twins from Baltic mythology, the Yumis.

According to another myth, the Ashvins saw the beautiful Sukanya emerging from the water. They offered her the choice of one of them as her husband. But Sukanya refused, as she already had a husband—the decrepit hermit Chyavana, who was no longer capable of amorous pursuits. The brothers then miraculously rejuvenated Chyavana by bathing him in the waters of a sacred lake. Together with him, they emerged from the water as handsome young men, indistinguishable from one another. Yet Sukanya still managed to 'make the right choice'. Chyavana gave her a secret sign, and she chose him.

Personally, I see a parallel in this story with 'our' Ivan Kupala, when an old man, unable to procreate, suddenly

miraculously, after immersing himself in the waters of a sacred lake, is rejuvenated, regains his youthful form and potency, and emerges transformed. We see a similar motif in P.P. Ershov's fairy tale 'The Little Humpbacked Horse', when the plain-looking Ivan—a peasant's son—is transformed into Ivan Tsarevich after bathing in a boiling cauldron, in milk and in cold water.

### ***THE SEVEN UNDERGROUND KINGS***

In other fairy tales, we see that as few as three brothers set off in search of their stolen sister and bride.

The number of brothers can reach five, seven, nine or twelve. Thus, in the Russian fairy tale about the twelve brothers, Elena the Wise attempts to distinguish the true brother from his, so to speak, 'emanations' (copies). She cuts a lock of hair from the sleeping youth's head. However, in the morning, he demands that his brothers cut their hair in exactly the same way. Elena the Wise presents the brothers with eleven silver cups of vodka and one golden one, in the hope that Ivan Tsarevich will take the golden one from her hands. But the brothers all rush towards the golden cup and start a general brawl...

In the Rigveda there is a famous riddle about two birds drawn to the same sweet fruit. But one of them eats the sweet fruit, whilst the other watches. Many believe that this refers to the sun and the moon, to a celestial wedding. However, apart from this meaning, the riddle apparently also contains information about the ancient cult of twins.

In Volkov's *\*Seven Underground Kings\**, there are seven kings who have agreed to take turns sleeping and ruling the world. When six are asleep in a secret underground chamber, one rules. The kings are put to sleep with the help of a special soporific plant juice. Volkov took this motif from the myths of peoples living in West Africa. This myth could well have been brought to Africa by migrants from the north, bearers of Indo-European culture.

The awake king and his sleeping companions are, in essence, similar to twin brothers who take turns living with their sister. This motif is found, in particular, in Russian fairy tales. Based on this motif,

A.S. Pushkin based his 'Tale of the Dead Princess and the Seven Heroes'.

### ***THE AGE OF THE MULTIPLE-HEADED***

The number of twin brothers rises to thirty, as in the Hittite myth. However, the number of twin sisters increases by exactly the same amount. The brothers, having returned to their homeland, marry their sisters without recognising them. And only one brother — the thirtieth — refused to marry his 'thirtieth' sister, as the gods had cleared his mind, and he realised that the woman before him was not his wife, but his sister. To some extent, the Indian myth of Krishna—the cowherd god who, in order to be with his beloved cowgirls, 'multiplied' himself into 15,000 'copies'—can be regarded as a variation on this theme... Krishna also had a full brother, Balarama, who did not possess such an astonishing ability to 'replication'. Instead, Balarama was considered the incarnation of the thousand-headed serpent Shesha, upon whom the god Vishnu rests.

Ultimately, we may surmise that the mythical hero's remarkable ability to endlessly reproduce his form served as the basis for the emergence of the narrative concerning a multi-headed divine ancestor. Thus, according to experts, the ancient Slavs possessed multi-headed idols whom they worshipped, such as Triglav. The number of a deity's heads could reach seven or nine, as in Polish mythology. 'Multiple heads' are also frequently found in ancient Native American mythology. One might recall the four-headed Brahma—the creator of the world—and the famous triad of gods, the Trimurti: Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. These three principal deities of Hinduism were conceived as an inseparable unity and personified the creation, preservation and destruction of the world. In the Kailasanatha Temple at Ellora, a three-headed depiction of the divine triad dating from the 8th century has been preserved.

Other Hindu deities are also known, such as the thousand-headed and thousand-armed Virabhadra, who spewed the world-destroyer Shiva from his mouth.

## ***THE EIGHT-HEADED DRUNKEN SNAKE***

It may be assumed that our Indo-European ancestors believed in multi-headed, multi-armed, and also multi-legged gods. Sacrifices were made to them. Evidently, from this practice arose myths and legends about dragons, to whom children and young people are given as food. It is possible that the three-headed dragon from Russian fairy tales is a counterpart to the Hindu Trimurti. The Old Russian deity Triglav may have been the prototype for such a dragon.

Myths about multi-headed dragons are not unique to the Indo-Europeans. One of the oldest Japanese legends tells of the eight-headed and eight-tailed serpent Yamata-no-Orochi. It is rather curious that the serpent's name bears a strong resemblance to that of Yama — the ruler of the realm of the dead in Hindu mythology — as well as to other similar names, such as, for example, the Iranian Yima... The cultural hero Susanoo meets the first humans — a husband and wife. In terror, they tell him a dreadful 'tale' of how a terrible eight-headed serpent crawled out from beneath the earth and devoured their seven daughters. The hero Susanoo promises to punish the man-eating serpent, but in return he demands that the parents give him their only remaining eighth daughter as his wife. The first humans agree. Then the cunning Susanoo sets out eight cauldrons of rice wine, sake, and invites the serpent to a 'tasting'. The serpent stuck all eight of its heads into the cauldrons at once, a moment the hero did not fail to seize. He cut off all eight of the monster's heads. The headless serpent collapsed, dead. One must assume, though the Japanese legend does not mention this, that it was from the marriage to the eighth daughter of the First People that humanity began to multiply.

## ***BROTHERLY FEUD***

Relationships between twin brothers do not always go smoothly. Brothers quarrel and even kill one another. One might recall

the biblical myth of Cain and Abel in this context. And what need is there to speak of brothers at all — the heads of a dragon also quarrel amongst themselves and bite one another, unable to share the sacrifice intended for them. In Russian fairy tales, each dragon's head has its own wife, which suggests that the dragon was not originally a single creature at all.

In Scythian and Iranian mythology, the three brothers personified the three social classes: the warrior, the ploughman and the priest. This motif evidently found its way into Russian mythology as well. Relations between the social classes did not always run smoothly. This is reflected in the epic 'Ivan Muromets and the Nightingale the Robber'. Alyosha Popovich, in a fit of anger, called Ilya Muromets—who had come to the prince's feast—'an unwashed country bumpkin from the woods' and hurled a damask steel knife at him. *'Ilya caught the sharp knife on the fly and plunged it into the oak table. He did not even glance at Alyosha... But Alyosha barked at him like a puppy at a bull: 'How much glory will he gain, sipping mead at merry feasts!' Ilya could not bear such treatment and left the prince's halls; he turned to Prince Vladimir with these words: 'The priest's son spoke the truth — it is not fitting for a warrior to sit at a feast and grow fat.'*

#### **WHAT IS THERE TO DIVIDE AMONG THE GODS?**

In Iranian society, the conflict between settled farmers and herders and nomads had become so acute that it required Zoroaster's religious reform, which divided the entire divine pantheon into 'our' gods and 'foreign' gods. The Devas became the embodiment of evil, although they traced their illustrious lineage back to the deity of the solar sky, who retained the name Dyaus in Baltic mythology... Meanwhile, both the nomads and the farmers were representatives of a single people — the Aryans.

This religious and class conflict did not spare the Indo-Aryans either. The Asuras, who were once gods, came to be known over time as nothing other than demons. The Devas, however, attained divine status among the Hindus.

Among the Iranians, the situation is the opposite — the benevolent Ahuras (hence the name of the supreme god Ahura Mazda) are opposed by the evil Devas.

Meanwhile, Surya is the sun god among the Hindus. It is logical to assume that the word ‘Asuras’ is derived from this name. The word ‘Asuras’ is interpreted as ‘not gods’. The prefix ‘a’ is negative.

This is a story of how humans fell out and caused the gods to fall out as well.

What do the sun gods and the gods of the radiant sky have in common?

The Russian words ‘**surik**’ (red) and ‘**surovy**’ (**harsh**) indicate that for our ancestors, too, Surya—the sun god—was a deity. And words such as ‘Div’ and ‘Divo-Divnoe’ denoted the radiant sky. The name of the ancient Greek god of thunder, Zeus, is related to Div. It is clearly linked to the Russian word Zev — ‘**radiance**’, ‘**glow**’, and also ‘**deed**’.

#### ***A RELICT OF AGRICULTURAL MAGIC?***

The motif of rival brothers is a common one in Russian fairy tales. Having set off together in search of a beautiful princess, the brothers fall out; and, harbouring evil intentions, two of the brothers kill the third. They kill their brother and throw his body into a deep well. In another version, they dismember his body and scatter the pieces across the field. In this unexpected plot twist, reminiscent of a sinister thriller, I personally see a metaphor for an ancient ritual of sacrifice. Moreover, this plot parallels the Egyptian myth of Osiris and Isis.

Let us recall that Osiris’s own brother, Set, not only killed him by tricking him into entering a beautiful box (coffin), but also, according to one version of the myth, dismembered Osiris’s body into fourteen pieces and scattered them throughout Egypt. Clearly, such an act of villainy was distinctly ritual in nature. Osiris was sacrificed to the gods. In this connection, we may recall the ancient Indian myth of how the gods sacrificed the first man, Purusha. They dismembered his body, and from its separate parts created the cosmos, the earth and the heavenly bodies. Similarly, in the ancient world, when sacrifices were performed, the sacrificial animal was dismembered, its various body parts being correlated with different cosmic objects. For example, there is evidence of sacrifices performed by Aryan

Brahmins. It was the priest's duty to associate the eye of the horse being sacrificed with the sun. One might suppose that, when we encounter the motif of the dismemberment of a dead body in the fairy tales and myths of various peoples, we are witnessing a kind of ritual return of the dead body to the cosmos, from whose elements it was once formed. Scattering the parts of the corpse across a field is evidently a remnant of agrarian magic.

### ***A VERY DARK STORY***

It is Ivan Tsarevich's sister who brings him back from oblivion: she gathers the parts of her brother's dead body in one place, fetches dead water and, sprinkling it over them, causes them to grow together. Then she fetches living water and revives her brother.

Osiris's divine sister Isis does much the same with her brother. She gathers the parts of his dead body from all over Egypt, embalms him, and conceives a son, Horus, from his dead body. Osiris himself, following this magical procedure, gains the ability to come back to life every year. A hidden power always slumbers within him, which is sometimes awakened to life and sometimes subsides. His awakening was signified by sprouting grains placed upon his image, as well as a tree that grew through his coffin. This tree is a symbol, a metaphor for the phallus... It is said that Osiris and Isis fell in love whilst still in their mother's womb.

It is quite interesting that the cult of Isis became widespread in the ancient world. It is evident that the priests of the temple of Isis emulated her brother and husband Osiris in every way. They castrated themselves in the hope that the goddess would miraculously restore their lost ability to procreate. Valery Bryusov, in particular, writes about this in his work 'The Priest of Isis'. Moreover, A.S. Pushkin's work \*Egyptian Nights\* paints a scene full of drama in which Queen Cleopatra, evidently imitating the goddess Isis, offers her lovers the chance to spend a 'royal' night with her, only to lose their lives the following morning. Strange as it may seem, there are those who do so...

This idea is, in fact, not new. In the ancient world, the cult of the Great Mother was widespread. Take Attis, for instance—the beloved priest of Cybele, the mother of the gods, and guardian of her temple, who, captivated by a nymph, forgot his duties and his vow of celibacy. In retaliation, the cruel Cybele sent madness upon Attis, and he castrated himself. Nor did Zeus remain indifferent to this outrage. He sent a wild boar after Attis, which killed him. Spring flowers spring from Attis's blood, as a symbol of unrequited love... Yes, the gods can deal harshly with those who displease them. In essence, Attis himself is a sacrifice offered to the gods.

### ***ISHTAR — A VERY OLD MOTHER***

A similar myth existed in its time in Assyrian mythology. Apparently, this myth dates back to the 3rd millennium BC. The myth tells of Ishtar, the goddess of carnal love.

Digressing slightly from the topic, I would say that this name is by no means unfamiliar to the Russian ear. It can be interpreted as Ishtar — the Old Mother. In the past, the matriarch was revered in every way; no one wished to see her as an 'old woman'. Many sought her favour. At the same time, they did not even look at the young ones...

So, in one of the Assyrian myths, Ishtar, the goddess of carnal love, decided to visit her sister Ereshkigal, who was queen of the underworld...

Here we see how the interpretation of the myth changes: the main character turns out to be not a man, but a woman. Moreover, she has not a brother, but a sister—and not just any sister, but the queen of the underworld.

Ishtar descended into the underworld and immediately lost all her creative powers. To put it in modern terms, 'she lost her spark'. Her own sister treated Ishtar harshly. She imprisoned her in an underground palace. But what then began to happen on Earth! The desire for carnal love vanished from the earth:

The bull no longer mounts the cow, The  
donkey no longer covers the donkey-  
mare...

The husband sleeps in his  
bedroom, The wife sleeps in hers.

It goes without saying that this situation could not go on for long. Having lost all desire, humans, animals and insects were unwilling to continue their line. The gods were forced to rescue the goddess from the underground captivity of her own sister. But the goddess of death is stubborn too. She refuses to release her sister without a ransom. Ishtar gives her her own lover, Tammuz—the god of nature’s spring rebirth—as ransom. In Assyria, he was usually depicted as a shepherd holding a flute.

#### ***A VERY REAL-LIFE STORY***

Tammuz, upon learning of the fate that awaits him, flees to foreign lands in an attempt to escape his destiny. He transforms himself first into a gazelle, then into a lizard. But it is all in vain. Ishtar’s messengers catch up with him and take him to the gloomy abode of Ereshkigal, the Queen of Death.

And here Tammuz’s sister, Geshtimanna, the goddess of the vine, reveals an unexpected side to her character. She is so filled with love for her brother that she is prepared to descend into the gloomy realms of death in his place. But Ishtar sees things differently. She settles the matter with admirable pragmatism: her lover will spend half the year in the realm of darkness, and the other half with her. In his place, his sister will descend into the realm of death for half a year. This myth ends with a joyful song sung by the participants in the drama. Everyone is content. But it seems that some of the participants in this drama have more reason to be satisfied than the others.

Here we see the same plot, albeit with a slightly different interpretation. The brother leaves his sister, and the wife her husband. The brother meets his sister only for a brief moment, when one ascends from the realm of the dead whilst the other descends into it. The goddess of fertility has her lover for only six months, and for the rest of the time must content herself with enforced abstinence...

However, there is one caveat to this story. According to the myth, at the same time as Tammuz, the god of agriculture Enkimdu was also courting Ishtar's hand and heart. Evidently, it is he who will please Ishtar during Tammuz's absence. Of course, this is not stated explicitly...

In this myth, which dates back five thousand years, we see reflected the growing conflict between shepherds and farmers. Even the goddess of carnal love does not know whom to favour, and so makes a truly Solomonic decision — half a year with one, half a year with the other.

## Chapter 14. TERRIFYING TALES

In this chapter, the reader will find a tale of that strange place where the Maiden-Tsar lives and what she has in common with the goddess of fertility. The reader will learn why the Maiden-Tsar is called half-serpent, half-maiden. This chapter also contains a tale of a sister's sinister thoughts against her own brother; of Dobrynya's 'lessons'; of the serpent-tempter; of the hero's heart; of the fiery-bright flower; and of what one hears when one tries to pluck the fern's blossom. It also tells of when the treasure 'blooms' and how to 'catch' it; of how a peasant sold his bast shoes to the devil; of who is the casket and who is the key; and of the miraculous properties of cemetery nettles.

### *WHERE THE KING-MAIDEN LIVES*

In my view, the well-known Baba Yaga—a constant character in Russian fairy tales—is quite comparable to the Assyrian goddess of death, Ereshkigal... Baba Yaga lives in a hut on chicken legs — a clear reference to a cult of the dead. Such 'huts' for the deceased could once be found in the north of Rus'.

Baba Yaga devours children, which points to the cult of sacrifices to the goddess of death that existed in distant pagan times. The very word 'yagya' in Sanskrit means a fire sacrifice... And the name Baba Yaga can be interpreted quite literally in Russian as Baba-ogya (Baba-fire). Our ancestors believed that by burning the body of the deceased on a funeral pyre, they were sending their soul to the realm of the dead; the goddess of death would then take it under her 'care'. Perhaps this is where the motif arose that Baba Yaga roasts children and adults in her oven.

And the entire 'setting' of Baba Yaga's dwelling is in keeping with this theme: 'a fence around the hut made of human bones, skulls on the fence, a human leg instead of a bolt, and — hands, and instead of a lock — a mouth with sharp teeth'. In the oven, the wicked old woman attempts to roast the children she has abducted...

As we learn from Russian fairy tales, Baba Yaga's relative is Tsar-Devitsa. This character, despite her kinship with the 'goddess of death', is the complete opposite of Baba Yaga. Tsar-Devitsa is stately and majestic. In fairy tales, she is referred to as a mighty warrior or a giantess. You cannot argue with such a figure: 'She struck one of Ivan Tsarevich's brothers with a flick of her finger and killed him.'

Sometimes the Tsar-Maiden appears in the guise of a serpent — 'half serpent, half maiden'. The Tsar-Maiden lives in an impregnable tower, on a high mountain in the middle of an island in the middle of the ocean.

### **THE TSAR-MAIDEN AS A GODDESS OF FERTILITY**

The Tsar-Maiden leads the life of the noble elite of society — she strolls through the garden, plays with the heroes — testing her strength against them — or sleeps her heroic sleep. And she sleeps for 12 days on end. During this time, all her servants and maids are overcome by sleep. In the image of the Tsar-Maiden, another figure can be discerned — the 'Sleeping Princess'. In fairy tales, the Tsar-Maiden is indeed called Usonsha the Heroine (from the word 'sleep'). The most remarkable feature of the Tsar-Maiden is that trees bearing apples of youth grow from her armpits, and 'healing living water' flows from her hands and feet. It is in search of these 'apples of youth' and 'living water' that Ivan Tsarevich sets out on his quest.

The image of the Tsar-Maiden is crystal clear — she is a goddess of fertility... In Assyrian mythology, she is known as Ishtar. As is evident from the Russian folk tale, both Ivan Tsarevich's grandfather and his father undertook the journey to the Tsar-Maiden... which is why they had children.

Ivan Tsarevich's horse, however, instructs Ivan: *'When you enter the third room, you will see a naked warrior-chieftainess sleeping on a high bed. Take the apples of youth from her body, scoop up the living water with your belt, but be careful not to touch her... and do not look at her; if you glance at her, you will be lost—she will wake up, and her servants will seize you, and you will not be able to save your wild little head.'*

However, Prince Ivan entered the maiden-queen's chambers, plucked the apples from her mighty body, scooped up the living water with his belt, yet could not

resist—he looked at her. Then his brave heart leapt at such indescribable beauty. Prince Ivan was stirred, his eager heart leapt, he kissed the Tsar-Maiden on her sweet lips and crushed her maiden beauty... The Tsar's daughter awoke at that moment — the Tsar's son barely managed to make his escape. The Tsar's daughter gave birth to two brothers. They grew not by the day, but by the hour. Barely a year had passed when the Tsar's Daughter set off with her mighty sons to seek out her lover, and she did indeed find Prince Ivan, and he married her. And he became tsar of her enchanted kingdom...

### ***'HALF SNAKE, HALF MAIDEN'***

The fact that the warrior maiden is fast asleep when Prince Ivan makes his way to her allows us to identify this plot with nature's winter slumber, with the first rumblings of thunder and the first spring rain, after which nature awakens; but not immediately, not all at once.

The fairy tale 'The Apples of Youth' deals with seasonal rebirth. The two sons, who grow not by the day but by the hour, symbolise rapid blossoming and the appearance of the first greenery. Thus, having obtained the apples of youth and the living water, Prince Ivan, amongst other things, impregnates the goddess of fertility. This procreative role of his is identical to that of the god Perun.

Interestingly, there is another remarkable character in the fairy tale — lying around the Tsar-Maiden's tall tower, having turned over three times, is her uncle. One must not offer him a hand; if he wakes up, he might accidentally swallow Prince Ivan along with his horse. In this 'uncle' of the Tsar-Maiden, one can discern the traits of the serpent—Veles. Nature's springtime exuberance can turn into disasters—floods and hurricanes.

The serpent Veles guards the enchanted palace — this very fact emphasises the connection between the goddess of fertility and death — the realm of the dead. And the very journey to the voluptuous goddess and the possession of her is far from safe. Love and death sometimes go hand in hand.

The Tsar-Maiden's kin cannot be called benevolent — Baba Yaga, serpents, and the Tsar-Maiden herself is 'half serpent, half maiden'. Bound

by strong family ties to the world of the dead — there's no getting round that.

To this we might add that in Hittite mythology, the goddess of fertility is called Shavushka — a name that sounds quite Russian indeed. Moreover, Shavushka has two brothers — the sun god and the god of thunder. Thus, here too the entire mythological narrative is played out by members of a single celestial family. The members of this family also turn out to be kings and queens in the realm of the dead.

### ***THE SISTER'S TEMPERAMENT HAS GONE AWRY...***

Folk imagination also attributes an insatiable nature to the figure of Marya — Ivan's own sister. In later interpretations, the motif of incest is reinterpreted. The sister no longer merely tempts her brother into carnal sin, but seeks to destroy him. Thus, a Russian folk song goes:

The red maiden gathered shavings.  
Having gathered them, she placed  
them on the fire. She roasted all the  
snakes and brewed a potion;  
She poured the potion before its time, and  
brought it to her dear brother.  
The potion was dreadful;  
she dripped some onto the  
horse's mane. The horse's  
mane caught fire.

The motif of the sorceress maiden baking snakes, brewing a potion and preparing a concoction for her own brother points to the intrinsic connection between the plot of this song and Midsummer rituals.

But her brother saw through her evil  
intent: he cut off his sister's wild head...

And he took wood from the fire, He laid the wood in the middle of the yard; As he burned the white body Down to the very ashes, He scattered the ashes across the open field, And forbade everyone to mourn or weep.

Here we also see the motif of fire and total destruction, characteristic of Kupala rituals.

An even more terrifying story is told in the epic tale of the bogatyr Dobrynya, who ‘taught a lesson’ to the sorceress Marina, the mistress of Zmey Gorynych. The very name of the sorceress, Marina, points to a semantic connection with Mara, the effigy that is burnt during Kupala rituals.

### ***DOBRYNA’S ‘LESSONS’***

Here is what is said in this epic:

‘Dobrynya gave her her first lesson — he cut off her hand, And he himself says:  
‘I have no need of this hand.  
She was teasing the Serpent Gorynychishch!’  
And his second lesson to her was to cut off her leg:  
‘And I have no need of this leg,  
It entangled itself with the Serpent Gorynychish!’  
And the third lesson the scholars taught her was to cut off her lips along with her nose:  
‘And these lips are of no use to me.  
They kissed the Serpent Gorynychishch!’  
The fourth lesson — he cut off her head and tongue:  
‘And this head is of no use to me.  
Nor is this tongue of any use,  
for it knew heretical deeds!’

Here, the punishment for her love affair with the Serpent Gorynych is presented in the form of a pagan sacrifice. We have already encountered a similar

‘dismemberment’ when we spoke of Osiris and the slain brother. Nevertheless, the motif of the bylin is generally rendered in a Christian style. This is indicated, in particular, by the phrase: ‘the tongue knew

of heretical deeds'. We are not revealing anything new when we say that in the Middle Ages heretics, as well as witches, sorceresses, sorcerers and 'ordinary' pagans, were subjected to brutal torture; their skin was flayed, they were branded with red-hot iron, and so on and so forth. The ultimate form of torture was burning at the stake. Witches were tested by being thrown, bound, into water to see whether the body would float or sink... if it floated, this was taken as further proof of the witch's connection with the devil. Paradoxically, the medieval ecclesiastical Inquisition employed rituals characteristic of paganism; that is to say, it widely applied the very methods it claimed to be fighting against... Nor shall we overlook the fact that the burning and drowning of witches and sorcerers was a symbol of pagan sacrifice, which was probably practised in times past on the night of Ivan Kupala.

Thus, A.N. Afanasyev (who lived before the revolution, when the Church's position was particularly strong) devoted an entire chapter in his book

*\*The Tree of Life\** to the trials of sorcerers and witches in Rus' and Russia, as well as to the tortures to which they were subjected. We shall not recount these gruesome stories.

### **TSVET-KOROLEVICH**

A.N. Afanasyev wrote: *'According to popular belief, every sorcerer and every witch enters into a pact with the devil, sells their sinful souls to him, and renounces God and eternal bliss.'* Nevertheless, the ancient Aryan religion and the new Christian religion coexisted for a very long time in the popular consciousness, and in some places continue to do so. Proof of this can be found in the imagery of fairy tales, in which the foundations of the old and new faiths are miraculously combined. In this regard, the Valak folk tale 'The Flower Prince'. It seems to me that this tale is also filled with Kupala imagery.

In a certain kingdom, in a certain realm, there lived a king who had a daughter—a beauty beyond compare. One day, in the height of summer, the daughter went into the forest with her friends and plucked a marvellous flower there. She brought the flower back to her chambers and could not take her eyes off it...

The beauty inhaled the flower's fertile pollen and became pregnant...

The king was furious; he thought the princess had sinned with a young man without his knowledge. He ordered a barrel to be made, his daughter to be placed inside it, and for it to be set adrift on the blue sea. No matter how much the princess wept, no matter how much she swore on her life that she had no one—it was all in vain. The king did not change his mind. And so the king's loyal servants did as they were told—they built a barrel, placed the princess inside, and set her adrift at the mercy of the waves and the wind.

In the barrel, the princess gave birth to a mighty warrior son. He grew not by the day, but by the hour. And so, by the will of God, the barrel was washed ashore. The son broke it open and led his mother out of her captivity into the free air. They saw a magnificent castle standing on the shore—inhabited by monstrous serpents. The young hero fought them and slew them all... Only one serpent remained—he had hidden in a secret chamber.

### ***THE TEMPTING SERPENT***

So mother and son began to live and thrive in the serpent's castle—they knew no misfortune. But when the warrior was away, the serpent transformed into a handsome youth and approached the mother with lewd words. The serpent seduced the warrior's mother and began to live with her. Together they plotted how to destroy the warrior.

In that region stood a great black mountain, where the great spirit of death dwelt, served by water nymphs. Following the serpent's advice, the mother sent the hero to that mountain to fetch her some living water to drink—she pretended to be unwell.

The warrior set off for the mountain and saw some beautiful nymphs. The nymphs took a liking to him; they found out why he was going up the mountain and began to try to dissuade him from climbing it. 'They said, "An evil spirit lives there—he will destroy you."' But the warrior did not listen to them; remembering his mother's command, he climbed the black mountain. There he found the fountain of life and had just bent down to draw living water from the spring when a thick black mist fell upon the mountain. At that very moment, a whirlwind swirled, lifted the hero into the air, tore him to thousands of pieces, and scattered them around the mountain. Immediately, all fell silent.

The nymphs emerged from the water, howled, wailed, and began to call for their queen. The Sea Queen emerged from the water and commanded her handmaidens to gather all the parts of the warrior's body. They found all the limbs; they put them all together, but the warrior's heart was missing—the evil serpent had carried it off. The queen sprinkled the warrior's body with living water, and he came back to life. 'How long have I been asleep?' said the warrior. 'Strange—my heart isn't beating.' 'How can it beat when it is not there?' replied the Sea Queen. 'It is with your mother; it is kept in a casket by the serpent's mistress. The serpent has destroyed you; he has taken your heart to her...'

### ***THE HERO'S HEART***

The Sea Queen instructed the hero: 'Dress in beggar's rags, cut off your fair curls, smear your face with black soot, and go to the palace; play at the serpent's wedding—here is a marvellous little lute — they play of their own accord. Exchange your heart with your mother for this fiddle.

And so the warrior did: he dressed in beggar's rags, cut off his fair curls, smeared his face with black soot, and went to the palace for the serpent's wedding. As soon as he touched the wondrous fiddles, they began to play of their own accord, so beautifully that everyone seemed to sink into a dreamlike trance.

'Ask for whatever you wish in exchange for these marvellous fiddles,' said the mother to her son.

'Give me the warrior's heart that you keep in your little casket,' replied the beggar. The mother was astonished by these words, but there was nothing she could do; she exchanged the lute for the warrior's heart—she had taken such a fancy to the instrument...

The warrior returned to the sea princess, who dipped the warrior's heart in the water of life and summoned a heavenly bird. The heavenly bird took the heart in its beak and placed it back in the warrior's chest, where it had been before. The hero took his sharp sword and went to the palace, where his treacherous mother shared her bed with the accursed serpent. The hero cut off all three of the serpent's heads, but he could not bring himself to cut off his mother's heads—his hand would not rise. 'Let God himself judge you.' The son walked with his mother out into the open field and said: 'Stand beside me, Mother; whichever of us is at fault, the sword will find that one itself.' With these words, he hurled his sharp sword

towards the sky. The mother pressed herself close, very close, to her son. But the sword found the guilty one—it struck her right in the heart.

### ***HEAT-LIGHT***

According to Afanasyev, the mysterious, wondrous flower, the pollen of which, when inhaled, caused the princess to become pregnant, is known among the Croats as ‘Perun’s flower’ and among the Horutans as ‘sunflower’. In Russia, such a flower is called ‘svet-tsvet’ or ‘zhar-svet’, as well as ‘fern flower’.

One Russian fairy tale tells of a heartbroken bride who had lost her fiancé. A beautiful flower grew on her fiancé’s grave. The bride plucked it and took it home. The bride marvelled at it, marvelled at it, and soon found herself with child. Another fairy tale tells of how, on a full moon, the flowers on a magical stem come to life and begin to speak in human voices... and call out to unmarried maidens at the stroke of midnight.

And as we recall, according to legend, on Ivan Kupala Day, herbs are imbued with healing power. And on that night, a magical flower blooms. Here, the flower is a metaphor for the male virility of the fallen hero. However, in the fairy tale, this metaphor takes on the concrete form of a phallus, awakened to life and to fertilisation.

According to legend, on the night of Ivan’s Day, the earth splits open and the treasures hidden within it ‘dry out’. It is worth noting that the word ‘klad’ is derived from the verb ‘klast’ (to lay). These words share the same root as the word ‘kladbishche’ — a place of rest. It was believed that in ordinary times, the treasures were guarded by the dead. And only on the night of Ivanov Day does the earth open up. At this time, an observant person can see, in deep chasms and dungeons, huge cauldrons and barrels full of gold and silver hanging from copper and iron chains. Unquenchable lamps burn around the rims of the cauldrons... But the moment you try to get closer, everything vanishes in an instant...

### ***CUT, STRIKE, DESTROY!***

You must know the conditions required by the oath to unearth the treasures from the ground this night. Without the oath, the treasure will not be revealed. The harder you dig, the more it will seem as though you are on the very verge of reaching the treasure; you might even hear the blade of your spade strike the wrought-iron lid of a chest, but no... at that very moment, the treasure plummets into the underworld with a terrifying rumble, from which the Homeric laughter of evil spirits can be heard...

Even if someone were to stumble upon the treasure without permission, there is still no way to carry it away. The moment you touch the gold, you will feel a terrible paralysis throughout your body—unable to lift a hand or take a step—as if your limbs were broken.

And whoever, having taken the gold, leaves the enchanted dungeon, will find themselves circling around it endlessly, unable to reach the road. They will be so weakened that they will consider it a blessing to return, to put everything back in its original place—where they found it—and only then will they be able to leave that place with relief; and they will be grateful to fate for their salvation.

At other times, the gold pieces themselves will leap between his fingers as if alive. At the same time, the earth will begin to close in, and the iron doors will shut. The man will sense the danger of remaining underground for ever. He will put everything back where he found it and flee from there whilst he is still unharmed.

But if he pays no heed to these dire warnings, dreadful visions will appear to him—fiery serpents will begin to advance upon him, opening their hideous maws; the man will smell the stench of sulphur and burning, and the foul odour of the dead... Terrible black dogs will rush towards the man. The dungeons will open and skeletons and monsters will emerge from them, screaming: ‘Slash, strike, destroy!’ Amidst the crowd of vile creatures, Mother Death herself will appear — breathing fire and gnashing her teeth, she will fix her empty eye sockets upon the man, and thousands of bony hands will reach out to him in a frenzied desire to strangle him.

Near the very spot where the treasure is buried, the spirit of its owner—who buried it—patrouls the area, along with guardian spirits.

**WHEN THE TREASURE ‘BLOOMS’**

|         |    |         |     |           |                      |     |
|---------|----|---------|-----|-----------|----------------------|-----|
| However | as | as      | the | the oath, | thethe treasures     | to  |
|         |    | surface | and | appear    | to the travellers in | the |
| form    |    |         |     |           |                      |     |

wandering lights. They may take the form of a golden branch, a golden cockerel, a golden hen with chicks, or a lamb, a calf, a bull or a cow, a horse, a pig or a dog, a cat, and sometimes even in human form. This is the most opportune time to lay claim to the treasure. One need only strike it with a swing of whatever comes to hand — and the treasure will scatter into a clinking shower of coins.

According to German legend, treasure buried in the ground rises closer to the surface by a rooster's stride each year. At the appointed time, the treasures come to light of their own accord and seek out their new owner. One peasant recounted how a horse with a golden coat suddenly appeared on a forest road. It would run ahead, then fall behind. This went on until the peasant, in a fit of anger, struck the horse with his whip. At that very moment, the magical horse crumbled into a heap of gold coins...

Belarusians revere the owner of the treasures, Grandfather. Dzedka, with burning eyes, dressed in rags and carrying a sack, meets the traveller and bestows gold upon him, after which he vanishes without a trace.

In Ukraine, there is a tale of an old man called Belun who, when encountered in the forest, asks you to wipe his runny nose. If you do so, the old man will instantly 'crumble' into gold.

A treasure that has not been found, that has not come into anyone's hands and has not found a new owner, returns to the earth. Then they say the treasure 'has blossomed'.

### ***EXACTLY AT TWELVE O'CLOCK...***

On the night of Ivan Kupala, the fern blooms. This happens at the time when the 'sparrow's night'—the shortest night of the year—sets in. According to ancient legend, on this night the Sun's chariot comes to a halt in the heavens, and Perun engages in battle with Beles. On this night, the sorcerers summoned a hurricane and a thunderstorm. The battle between Perun and Veles ended in a storm and a downpour. And the summer heat gave way to a scorching cold rain, as if from a bucket.

At exactly midnight on this pitch-black night, the fern flower—Perun's flower—blooms. It gives off such

bright light that it seems as though the sun itself had appeared in the depths of the night. But this flower lives for but a single moment: before you can even blink, it fades and vanishes, as if it had never been there. According to legend, it is plucked by an evil spirit and carried away to its underground lair. It is there, in the unfathomable depths, that it will burn with a bright flame until the next Ivan Kupala Night, when it will once again miraculously appear on the surface.

Anyone wishing to obtain a fern flower must set off into the forest on the eve of the bright festival of Ivan Kupala, taking a tablecloth and a knife with them. They must find a fern bush in the forest, sit down beside it, trace a circle around the bush with the knife, spread out the tablecloth, and, sitting within the closed circle, keep their eyes fixed on the bush. As soon as the flower lights up and its unearthly light begins to shine, he must pluck it immediately and hurry home, covering himself with the tablecloth. And at home, using the same knife, cut your finger or palm and place the flower into the wound. Then all that is hidden and revealed will instantly be made known to you... and all the secrets of the world will fall before your mind's eye, and nothing will remain hidden from you.

#### ***ON HOW A MAN SOLD HIS CLOG TO THE DEVIL***

Evil spirits will strive to outpace the man. Snakes will lie near the closed circle around the fern bush, staring intently at the bush... The moment the man shows the slightest fear, the evil spirits will get the better of him. If he manages to pluck the flower first, the earth will shake, a terrible screech will ring out, and vicious monsters will pounce on him, gnashing their teeth. If the man drops the flower in his fright, he will never see it again. If he does not lose his nerve, covers himself with the tablecloth and, without looking where he is going, races home, then he is the rightful owner of the flower!

The vicious furies may send sleep upon him, and he will sleep through his good fortune... Until you have obtained the flower, God forbid you should step out of the magic circle or look around — the moment you turn your head, it will remain turned forever! As soon as you have plucked

the flower, clasp it tightly in your hands — run home as fast as you can, without looking back...

Whoever possesses the flower becomes a seer. He foresees the future, as well as the present and the past. He knows the thoughts of others and understands the language of birds, beasts and reptiles. At will, he can instil an irresistible passion in a maiden's heart. And there is no strength or heart that could resist such a temptation. Anyone who carries the fern flower becomes invisible to people — as if they were not there. In reality, they are present and aware of everything, knowing what is happening both near and far...

They tell of a peasant who was searching for a lost cow in the forest at night, and accidentally caught a fern flower with his bast shoe. In that very moment, he found the cow and saw treasures buried in the ground. When he came home, his family, hearing his voice but not seeing him, were terrified. But then he took off his shoes — and at that very moment everyone saw him. The man instantly forgot all the treasures he had seen, and everything that had been so clear to him became hidden once more. The devil approached him and bought the sandal from him for a gold coin, and along with the sandal, he carried off the fern flower.

### ***WHO IS THE BOX, AND WHO IS THE KEY?***

Whoever possesses the flower can 'leap' from place to place; stone mountains crumble before him, and iron bars fall away. He sees through stone walls as though through glass. Wherever he wishes to be, there he will be. That is precisely why the fern flower is called leap-grass, 'leaper-grass', leaping grass, and also 'break-grass'. If you hold the flower against a barred door or a lock, it will instantly shatter into pieces. If you throw it into a smithy, not a single blacksmith will be able to forge or hammer iron there, no matter how hard they try!

That is precisely why thieves, when they manage to obtain the magic flower, cut their finger and insert it into the slit, then heal the wound. At the touch of this finger, the bolts fall from the chest and the locks spring open. According to folk tales,

some people implanted Perun's flower into their reproductive organs. No girl would ever turn such a man down, and his virility was boundless!

In a Russian folk tale, we find a poetic account of a peasant who found Perun's flower and was away from his family for a long time. Meanwhile, the prince's sons had gathered at his beautiful wife's house. They sit at the table, drinking mead and casting sidelong glances at the stranger's wife. At that very moment, the husband returned from his distant travels with the 'break-the-grass'. No one noticed him, only his wife recognised him by his footsteps. She then posed this riddle to the princes: 'I had a casket with a golden key, but the key was lost, and I had given up hope of ever finding it. But now it has turned up. Whoever guesses the answer—I shall marry him.'

The princes thought and thought for a long time, but could not guess what it was. The beauty said to her husband: 'Show yourself, my dearest friend.' The kind young man appeared. 'Here is the answer: I am the casket, and the golden key is my faithful husband.'

### ***IT BURNS, BUT IT DOESN'T PRICK***

Thus, we see that Perun's flower possesses truly miraculous properties. It causes a maiden to become pregnant, which evokes certain associations with the biblical myth of the Immaculate Conception. We may surmise that this myth has a very ancient history and dates back to pagan times. The religious reformer Zarathustra also speaks of the coming saviour of the world who, according to him, will be born of a virgin three thousand years hence and will be his own son.

Perun's flower also brings to life that which was previously dead. As soon as the magical flower touches a rock, it instantly crumbles to dust. Perun's flower blooms, illuminating the surroundings with its wondrous light, just as the underground chambers filled with treasures open up. Perun's flower breaks down locks and opens iron doors. In this, one can see an association with the opening of the flesh — with the capacity for fruitfulness. The underground chambers here symbolise the fruit-bearing womb of the Mother — Mother Earth.

In folk tales, Perun's flower (the fern flower) is sometimes associated with the nettle. It is thought that this association arose because nettles sting. And this stinging is likened to the action of the fiery flower. Such an identification can also be found in Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale about the twelve brothers turned into swans by an evil sorceress.

### ***THE MIRACULOUS PROPERTIES OF CEMETERY NETTLE***

The brothers' half-sister gives them a meal of silence until she has woven twelve shirts from nettles with her bare hands. She gathers the nettles in the graveyard, where she goes at night. And all day long she weaves shirts from nettles. Despite such odd behaviour, the local prince fell in love with the beautiful girl and took her as his wife. But the princess did not give up her strange occupation, and, without uttering a word, continues her work. Her hands are swollen from the nettles, and her fingers are stiff. Yet not a single sigh or complaint escapes her lips. A beautiful smile still plays on her face. Rumour has it that the princess possesses the powers of a witch, and the people demand that the witch-princess be burned at the stake. The prince yields. And so the girl, along with her belongings, is taken to her execution. Yet she does not stop her work for a single moment. And just as the pyre is lit and the beauty is led onto it, twelve swans—her brothers—fly in. She throws the nettle shirts over them. And in that very instant, the witch's spell is broken and the swans turn into stately young men—her brothers. The maiden had not managed to weave just one sleeve, and so one brother was left with a wing instead of an arm. The people realise that before them stands not a witch, but a victim of witchcraft.

This marvellous tale is undoubtedly based on folk tales and legends. Cemetery nettles, like the magic flower that grew on the grave of a deceased fiancé or husband, possess miraculous properties; of course, they do not make anyone pregnant—they bring life. Under their influence, not only iron locks and shackles fall away, but the shackles of witchcraft too.

The motif of the swan brothers from Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale is particularly intriguing. They carry their sister to their wondrous land, much like the swans harnessed to Apollo's chariot. This land bears all the hallmarks of paradise. Merely by touching this wondrous land, they become human once more.

### ***THE SWAN MOTIF***

This motif is frequently found in Russian fairy tales and in legends about swan maidens and mermaids. Thus, according to popular belief, mermaids have webbed toes, like geese. This is what people assume when they see mermaid footprints left on the wet sand. Usually, mermaids smooth down the sand and cover their tracks so as not to reveal their 'swan-like' nature. However, when caught off guard, they rush towards the water and do not have time to do so. It is then that one can see their 'goose-like' footprints.

In the fairy tale about the Sea Tsar and his wise daughter, Ivan Tsarevich sets off to the far-off lands, reaches the vast ocean, and hides behind some bushes. At that very moment, a flock of swans (ducks) arrives there. They shed their white wings and feathers on the shore and enter the water as naked maidens. They frolic in the water, unaware that Ivan Tsarevich is watching them. Our hero crept up quietly and took the feathers of Vasilisa the Wise. All the enchanting maidens were startled; they snatched up their little feathered wings, instantly turned back into swans and flew away. Only Vasilisa the Wise remained. She asks Prince Ivan to return her white gown, promising to become his wife in return.

A similar plot is found in Indian mythology, where the shepherd-god Krishna, hiding, steals the clothes of the young shepherdesses. He is willing to return them only in exchange for a passionate kiss.

The Wise Swan-Bird, the red maiden, also features in the epic tale of Potok-Mikhail Ivanovich:

The white swan—a bird all golden through its feathers, and its head — entwined with red gold, studded with sloping pearls. Potok draws

Potok draws a taut bow from his quiver, an arrow from his knee-quiver, and aims to shoot the swan.

*The white swan warns him:*

*'Do not shoot me...'*

*She stepped out onto the steep bank,*

*Turned into a red-hearted maiden...*

*And she married Potok-Mikhail Ivanovich.*

## Chapter 15. On the Miraculous Birth of the Sorcerer Vseslavievich

This chapter tells of the sun swans; of mermaids; of beregynas and gorynyas; of the mermaids' farewells; of goats and donkeys; of the donkey's hard lot; and also of the one who ate the golden fish and became pregnant; of the fiery nature of the devil and the dragon; the 'Hammer of Witches'; those who play tricks on us; witches and sorceresses; the serpent-tempter, the Magus Vseslavievich; the trickster and the serpent's talisman; how the three-headed serpent was worshipped; dragons and serpents — former gods; about the herb medyanitsa, which revives and... kills.

### *THE SUNNY SWAN*

The identification of the dead with swans is a very ancient motif. It is found in many Indo-European myths. The plot of the ancient Greek myth about the transformation of Zeus, the god of thunder, into a swan, captivated by the beauty of Leda, is also interesting.

The swan motif is closely linked to the sun. Thus, according to an ancient Indian legend, a certain rishi (sage), having grasped the laws of existence, transforms his body into a golden swan through the power of his mind. He soars above the sinful earth and flies towards the sun... and merges with the sun, attaining eternal bliss. In Aeschylus's Greek tragedy, a dying swan also breaks free from the earth and flies towards the sun; it utters its final cry — singing its

'swan song', after which the dead bird plunges into the depths of the sea.

The swan and the sun is a motif frequently explored in Russian folk tales.

The Yakuts believed that their people traced their ancestry back to a swan maiden who had descended to Earth from the sun itself. The Buryat clans of the Sharyat and Kharyat passed down their ancestral legend that they were descended from the marriage of a shaman and a swan maiden.

The swan is a prophetic bird, say Russian folk tales. It appears with the arrival of spring, then flies away across the sea, carrying with it spring, fertility and the sun.

We may surmise that our distant ancestors identified swans with mermaids — inhabitants of bodies of water. Among the Hindus, some vestiges of this identification have survived. Thus, they refer to the celestial maidens (apsaras), who inhabit the airy realm between the earth and the sun, as ‘those who walk upon the waters’. The celestial maidens are prone to shape-shifting, which is understandable given their misty, cloud-like nature. The apsaras love to transform themselves into swans or into celestial cows, bearing abundant milk in their udders. In this form, they are overtaken and milked by the genies of thunder — the gandharvas.

### ***BEAUTIFUL UNDERWATER PALACES***

In Czech, when autumn mists rise upwards, they say: ‘the old women have risen’. In Bavaria, however, a dark, rain-laden cloud is called: ‘the old woman with lye’ (meaning torrential rain). In summer, the ‘women’ or Mrachenka (from the word mračno — a dark cloud) emerge from deep wells and rise high into the air. Then they ‘float’ in the clouds and descend together with torrential rain.

Such beliefs are also reflected in sayings and proverbs. For instance, in Russia, when bathing a child, people chant: ‘An old woman came from across the sea, carrying a basket of health: a little piece for this one, the whole little basket for you!’. Afterwards, as they pour water over the child, they say: ‘Water off the goose, thinness off you; may the water go down, and you go up!’ (grow, thrive).

Here we see the identification of a cloud with a full-breasted wife who bestows milk — the healing rain during the days of the summer heat.

As A.N. Afanasiev writes:

‘Later, when a clear understanding of the ancient metaphors was lost and when the poetic tales of heavenly streams were cast down to earth, these wives and maidens left the aerial realms and took possession of earthly waters, whilst retaining many curious

features of their original origin. Thus appeared the Nymphs and Nereids in Greece, the Nixen in Germany, and in our lands and among the Czechs  
— mermaids.

According to legend, mermaids have a beautiful dwelling in the depths of the waters—a crystal palace adorned with diamonds, sapphires, pearls and various shells. When the midday sun shines, one can see the waves rolling over the roofs of the beautiful palace and rushing onward... The Czechs have the ‘vodní panna’, a tall, beautiful queen of the waters with a pale face. Her dwelling is made of silver and gold and adorned with roses and pearls. According to Lithuanian legend, the queen of the Baltic Sea, Jurata, also has a palace just as opulent.

### ***MERMAIDS, BEREHINY, GORYNY***

Folklore associates mermaids with water; however, more ancient sources indicate that mermaids also have other dwellings not connected with the element of water. Thus, in ‘Abevege of Russian Superstitions’ it is recorded that mermaids live not only in rivers but also in the mountains. They love to run along their slopes. This is evidently why the Czechs call high cliffs ‘women’s mountains’. The Paisievsky collection of manuscripts from the St Sophia Cathedral in Novgorod mentions offerings made to rivers, springs and beregins. The word ‘bereginya’ derives from or is related to the word ‘bereg’. ‘Bereg’ or ‘breg’ is, in fact, a mountain. We can therefore equate the bereginya with the gorynya — the guardian of rocks and mountains.

In Russian mythology, mermaids are also associated with the forest. In spring, emerging from the water, they scatter across the neighbouring groves and forests and blend almost completely with the lesunky — the guardians of the forest. They too love to swing on the branches of trees in the evening, and beckon travellers to them with their wonderful, sweet-voiced singing.

Before the revolution, a custom persisted in some places: in the spring, during Bright Week and Trinity Week, peasants would go into the forest and twist together the branches of two neighbouring birch trees. So that the mermaids and forest spirits could swing on them as

on a swing. On the Dnieper there is still an old, dense forest known as the 'mermaids' grove'.

### ***THE RUSALKA PROCESSION***

In Rus', it was believed that mermaids appeared with the first thunderstorms, when the rivers flooded, the willows blossomed and the fields turned green. They remained in this world until late autumn, and then, together with migratory birds, they migrated south. Ancient chronicles mention mermaid festivities, which were subject to prohibition. These festivities took place during 'Mermaid Week'. In Ukraine, to this day, the Thursday of Trinity Week is known as 'Mermaid's Great Day'. On this day, dances and round dances were held in the forest, accompanied by music and costumes. It was believed that the mermaids themselves, to whom these celebrations were dedicated, would join in the round dances.

However, mermaids do not bring only good fortune. According to folk belief, fierce winds and downpours are all the mischief of the mermaids. For the ears of grain to fill out, ripen and yield a good harvest, calm weather with moderate rainfall is needed; that is why, even today, in some regions of Russia, one can still find remnants of the ritual to drive away the mermaids. The Sunday following Trinity Sunday near Ryazan was known as the 'mermaid's feast'. The next day, a straw doll representing a mermaid was erected there; people danced in circles around it. Afterwards, the circle splits into two groups. One group of people taking part in the festival tries to snatch the doll, tear it apart and scatter it to the wind, whilst the other group prevents them from doing so. The participants douse each other with water and throw sand at one another; eventually, the mermaid is 'caught' and, accompanied by songs, carried to the river and thrown into the water so that she might live there and not 'steal the bread'.

Thus, the ritual of seeing off the mermaids can be classified as an ancient magical rite, the purpose of which is to temper the springtime fury of the elements. Sometimes this ritual was referred to as the 'send-off of spring'.

### ***'FREEZE' 'MELT AWAY'***

In Russian fairy tales, Ivan Tsarevich steals the wings of the Swan Princess, and in exchange for them receives a promise of marriage. But the Swan Princess, so to speak, puts forward a condition of her own—she warns him that until a certain time she will retain her swan form. Prince Ivan could not wait and burnt the swan's wings before the deadline, and the Swan Princess sets off forever to other lands — to the realm of death...

This fairy tale reflects a philosophical aspect of existence: the transience of human life. It tells of star-crossed lovers and the irresistible force of fate. Mother Death herself intervenes in the lovers' wedding song.

Whilst Perun's colour brings life and awakens from a centuries-long slumber, Baba Yaga's magic wand—the moment she waves it or touches anyone with it—turns that person to stone.

This magic wand of Baba Yaga is identical to Hermes' lightning-fast staff, the touch of which plunges one into an eternal, deep sleep.

One might recall the children's game 'Freeze', in which the leader, by touching a player with the magic wand and uttering the magic words 'freeze' and

'come to life' turns the player first into a stone statue and then brings them back to life. Undoubtedly, this simple game reflects the ancient belief of our forebears in resurrection from the dead.

Hindus believe that after death, a person's soul can enter not only a human body, but also the body of an animal. By observing the smoke from the funeral pyre, the sages (rishis) predict what the soul's life path will be in its next incarnation. It seems that Russian fairy tales, with their marvellous transformations of people into various birds and animals, also trace back to the same ancient source as the Indian belief in reincarnation.

### ***ON GOATS AND DONKEYS***

Remember how V. Vysotsky sang: 'The Hindus came up with a fine religion... This splendid dog used to be a human...'. The point is that it wasn't the Hindus who came up with it. Such beliefs go back to

the archetypal heritage of the ancient Aryans or, if you will, the Indo-Europeans.

In a Russian fairy tale, the main character turns into a snotty-nosed goat. This is probably not just a metaphor. The goat-footed ancient Greek Pan personifies the lustful element in man. And our contemporaries often use the slang word 'goat' for any reason or none at all, equating their offender with this very archetypal 'snot-nosed' goat.

However, just as there is no eternal bliss in heaven, there is no eternal torment on earth — a goat's life is fleeting. The fairy-tale goat dreams of his goatish life coming to an end as soon as possible. And suddenly the 'goat' spots a lyre; and an ancient legend comes to life in his mind — as soon as you touch the sacred strings, your goatskin will fall away.

The 'goat' rushes towards the lyre and begins to strum the strings with his hooves. And at that very moment, his human nature awakens — his soul awakens. The goatskin falls from his shoulders, and he becomes a strikingly handsome young man.

A similar plot can be found in the work of a certain ancient Greek author from the 4th century BC. He narrates the story from the perspective of a man transformed into a donkey. Peering at a pretty witch, he saw that she had stripped naked, rubbed herself with a magical ointment, and then turned into a crow and flew out of the open window. This man, no fool himself, also wanted to take on a bird's form. He undressed, rubbed himself from head to toe with the magic ointment... but picked up the wrong jar. And so he turned into a donkey — a rather charming, long-eared one. His own horse did not recognise him and nearly gouged out his eye with a hoof as he made his way, dejected, to the stable to nibble on some oats.

This donkey with a human soul had to endure much before he regained his human form. Yet he did so not by touching the strings with his hooves, but by tasting roses—such was the power of the spell.

### ***A HARD DONKEY'S LOT?***

Needless to say, this donkey's path was not strewn with roses, although he had 'subconsciously' longed for them throughout his donkey-like life. The Greek author, very naturally—one might say from inside the donkey's skin—narrates all the 'hardships' and troubles of such a transformation. Thus, the 'new' donkey was given only straw and oats, which he could not stand. And so one day his master caught his donkey engaged in a strange activity. A table had been laid out in the courtyard. Whilst no one was around, the donkey pounced on the roast, washing it down generously with wine from a jug. The owner realised that such an unusual donkey could be put on display for money. He set the table, and to the delight of everyone present, the donkey dined demurely on roasted baby birds, washing them down with wine. However, the wife of the 'resourceful' owner realised that the donkey was good for something else as well. After a hearty meal and drink, the donkey became aroused... The owner's wife took a chance on a sexual experiment... She was enchanting, as the ancient Greek author writes. It all ended with the donkey being paraded in the arena; first he ate meat delicacies and drank wine, and then he climbed onto a bed set up in the arena with a voluptuous beauty reclining upon it. The crowd went wild. No wonder they say: all the crowd wants is bread and circuses...

As a token of gratitude, the donkey was thrown the coveted roses from the arena, which he immediately ate and, before the eyes of the astonished crowd, turned into a man.

What a commotion ensued... The crowd demanded their money back, accusing the organisers of fraud. A man had been hiding in the guise of a donkey...

And the master's beautiful wife, who had so tenderly stroked his coat when he was a donkey, rejected him as a man and sent him packing. She told him in no uncertain terms that she had loved him for his gentle nature, for his big ears, for his understanding eyes, and for his large donkey... penis. None of these things remained with him after he became a man.

After this, the author of the comedy asks sarcastically: 'Why on earth did I become a man, then?'. The beauty rejected him, the crowd beat him up, and no one is going to feed and water him just for the sake of it — for fun.

## **WHO ATE THE GOLDEN FISH?**

If the marvellous Swan Princess marries Prince Ivan, then God himself may appear in the guise of a marvellous fish...

Let us recall the popular folk tale 'At the Pike's Command...'. The magical pike, caught by the fool Emelya, grants his most cherished wishes. And these wishes, true to Emelya's character, are foolish. 'I wish that, at my request, by the pike's command, the princess might bear a child in her womb.' And so it happens at once — the princess becomes pregnant.

This plot is found in other folk tales, where maidens give birth to mighty heroes. For instance, a certain queen had no children. A wise man told her what to do; at his instigation, her servants cast a silk net into the sea, woven by seven-year-olds—boys and girls. With this net, they caught a single golden fish. The cooks prepared a stew from the fish, which the princess ate; the cook gnawed at the leftovers, and the cow drank the slop. From that very day, all three became pregnant and gave birth simultaneously to three sons: Prince Ivan, Ivan the Cook's Son, and Ivan the Cow's Son. The lads grew not by the day but by the hour, and became three mighty heroes of the Russian land...

A similar tale existed among the Serbs. The Vile (water nymphs) say to the king:

'Let the king gather the maidens of Budim.  
Let him bring much pure gold and weave a fine net. A fine net of  
pure gold,  
Let him cast the net into the tranquil Danube,  
Catch the golden-winged fish  
And take its right wing, Let him  
release the fish back into the  
water,  
And give the wing to his lady, the princess:  
When she eats the right wing —  
She shall immediately bear a prince in her womb.'

Perhaps be this fairy-tale, ancient and I would say  
that this wholesome plot is mirrored by a modern, risqué little fable

about a certain young lady who wants to both eat the fish and... sit on it.

In these folk tales, one can easily discern the motif embodied by A.S. Pushkin in his 'The Golden Fish'. As we can see, the folk tale is more... naturalistic.

### ***DRAGONS AND BEAUTIES***

In Russian fairy tales, there is a common plot involving a fiery serpent (dragon) that flies down a chimney to a lonely widow and takes the form of her deceased husband. The widow, unversed in sorcery, mistakes the dragon for her husband and enters into a forbidden relationship with him. As a result, she becomes pregnant and gives birth to a little devil.

It is thought that such plots date back to even more ancient times. These stories have taken on a negative connotation, though they may once have been interpreted in a completely different light.

For instance, according to ancient manuscripts, the lineage of Chinese emperors is traced back to the red dragon. The emperors took pride in having such ancestors. Judging by folk tales, in days gone by, unions between totemic animals—wolves, bears and humans—were commonplace. For example, folk tales about a bear's wedding are a vivid illustration of this. We have already mentioned swans entering into marital relationships with humans...

Of course, there is no need to take these tales too literally — none of our ancestors practised bestiality. It was the gods themselves who took the form of totemic animals and, in that guise, entered into marital relationships with humans. This is presumably the origin of the generation of mortal heroes born of immortal gods.

The dragon, as the embodiment of light and fire, abducted the maiden. After which the maiden gave birth to a mighty warrior, who grew not by the day, but by the hour. Our ancestors believed that a fire similar to the heavenly fire burns within our bodies. This mystical connection with the deity of fire allowed the maiden to give birth to a mighty warrior...

### ***THE FIRE-LIKE NATURE OF THE DEVIL AND THE DRAGON***

In my view, such tales, if they existed, could well have subsequently been transformed into the seduction of inconsolable widows by a fiery serpent. Let us recall, for instance, our ancestors' belief in the fertilising power of lightning: after a good thunderstorm, not only do mushrooms appear in the forest, but babies are also conceived in their mothers' wombs.

The Devil, as interpreted by medieval theology, is precisely 'a spawn of hell'. The image of the devil, like that of the devil, is firmly associated with fire. However, the fiery nature of these characters is interpreted in a negative rather than a positive light. One might recall in this connection such expressions as 'the fiery Gehenna'. According to tradition, before our era, at the southern (Sun) Gate of Jerusalem, beyond the walls of the ancient city, there was a place where fires burned constantly. The bodies of the dead were cremated there. Smoke and a characteristic smell spread from this place. This place was called Gehenna. The epithet 'of fire' was added later.

For the Aryans and other peoples living in those distant times, fire was the beginning of all beginnings — thanks to the inner fire, the male seed fertilised the female womb. The funeral pyre was the logical conclusion of the life journey — through the funeral pyre, the inner fire hidden within a person rose with the smoke to its source — the heavenly fire.

### **'THE HAMMER OF THE WITCHES'**

However, medieval theologians reinterpreted this ancient motif in their own way. Thus, in the well-known medieval treatise \*The Malleus Maleficarum\*, we read that the devil is capable of assuming various guises. He visits not only unmarried maidens, wives and widows, but also men. At the appointed hour, having taken the form of a female spirit, he appears in the man's bed and leads him astray from the true path. Scholarly theologians maintained that the devil pursues a single goal in doing so—to take possession of the man's seed. Once the deed is done, he leaves the man to repent for what he has done, and, having now taken the form of a male spirit, sets off to seduce maidens, wives and widows. Having seduced them, he shares their bed and impregnates them with the semen 'stolen' from the man. As a result, the wives become pregnant and give birth to the devil—for, as the authors of the treatise conclude, a child born of the devil is also a devil. For this reason, all participants in this godless act should be burnt

at the stake; first, of course, after subjecting them to a thorough trial, so that they might purify their souls through repentance. There must be no leniency for anyone — neither for the men who succumbed to temptation, nor for the women who committed fornication and gave birth to a demon, nor for the children themselves, into whom the demon entered at the very moment of their conception.

### ***WHO IS PULLING WHOSE LEG?***

The authors of *\*The Hammer of Witches\** combat obscurantism and lawlessness in their own way. In their book, they recount gruesome folk tales in which a witch inflicts impotence upon men, or even deprives them of their penis, so that in place of this vital organ there remains only smooth skin. They also recount the popular belief that a witch keeps ‘stolen’ penises in a special box or a bird’s nest, that they move as if alive in their hiding place, and that she even feeds them as if they were birds.

The authors condemn all these popular superstitions and reveal the truth — it turns out that the man merely imagines his penis has been ‘stolen’; in reality, it is still in place, and the witch misleads him by distorting his sensory perception...

The authors examine a certain case involving a young man who, having supposedly lost his penis, begged the witch to return it to its former place. Using a ‘scientific’ approach, the authors explain to readers that the witch first deceived the young man’s senses, making him believe that his penis had vanished. She then, in exchange for a certain service, supposedly returned something that had never actually gone anywhere...

The conclusion is simple — witches mess with people’s heads, deceiving them for their own gain. First they create a problem, and then they supposedly resolve it successfully. It seems to me that such ‘scientific’ investigations and refutations are but a step away from ‘scientific’ atheism.

Where people put their penises and in what ‘nest’ they keep them is, of course, a matter of debate, but it is also not right to explain everything away as a deception of the senses — witches are not skilful magicians; at the very least, they (witches, not magicians) are representatives of an outdated religious system.

In this connection, one might recall the work of the ancient Greek author Petronius, *\*Satyricon\**. The hero of this work is afflicted by a dreadful ailment. Petronius, with expert knowledge, describes a witch who undertakes to cure the young man of impotence. The condition is simple — to spend the night in her embrace... The story ends with the young man fleeing from the amorous witch, not knowing which way to turn.

### ***WITCHES AND SORCERESSES***

In Russia, witches were called ‘veshchitsy’ (from the word ‘veshchaya’, meaning ‘prophetic’). However, before the revolution, there were folk tales about ‘veshchitsy’ that clashed sharply with the noble title of ‘witch’. For instance, villagers were convinced that veshchitsy possessed the ability to steal a baby from the womb of a sleeping mother and replace it with a burning ember or a crust of bread. The stolen baby would then fall victim to a terrible fate. The veshchitsy would light a fire on a stake, roast the child, and eat it. Similarly, people believed that these witches stole the hearts of lovers, replacing them with a piece of wood or a bundle of straw. To prevent the theft of children from the womb, pregnant women would gird themselves with their husband’s belt and don a man’s coat or cap. It was believed that such disguises would scare the witches away.

The malice of witches was also evident in the fact that they would steal or lure young children to them, roast them in an oven and, having gorged themselves on this dreadful feast, would roll about on the ground wailing: ‘I’ll roll, I’ll tumble, having eaten my fill of Ivashka’s flesh.’ However, such a depiction of witches is undoubtedly a later development. We may surmise that in bygone, irretrievably lost times, the witch was held in high esteem by the Rus’. This is eloquently suggested, in particular, by her very name — ‘vedma’, derived from the word ‘**vedati**’ (to know).

Perhaps this is why the successor to the vedunya—Baba Yaga—possesses a variety of magical items: a fiery mortar and a fiery broom, with which she flies through the skies. Baba Yaga also possesses magical fire-breathing horses, seven-league boots, a flying carpet, a self-playing lyre and a self-slicing sword. All these magical objects

help Prince Ivan when he sets off for the fairy-tale kingdom of Koschei the Deathless.

### ***THE TEMPTING SERPENT***

It is also quite interesting that where Baba Yaga appears in Russian fairy tales, the lamia and the draconid appear in Albanian and Greek fairy tales. Indeed, among the Slavs themselves, Baba Yaga and the mythical serpent-woman appear as identical characters. And in a Slovak fairy tale, the sons of the Hedgehog-Woman are depicted as ferocious serpents. Like a ferocious serpent, Baba Yaga loves to suckle the white breasts of beautiful women, thereby robbing them of their life force. Finally, like a serpent, Baba Yaga devours human flesh. Perhaps this is why in Russia Baba Yaga was sometimes called 'Yara'. And indeed, a witch in Kyiv was called a serpent. The Tsar-Maiden, too, has a serpentine form.

All this may be evidence that in times past, our ancestors' imagination included not only fire-breathing dragons who stole red-haired maidens, but also dragon-women who destroyed fine young men.

However, the marriage between a snake and a maiden was the most common theme. Thus, the peasants believed that a fiery snake flew across the sky during a thunderstorm, breathing fire. Above a hut familiar to him, he would scatter sparks and, through the chimney, appear before his chosen companion as a fine young man. This is what is said about such a serpent's ability in folk tradition: 'Without loving, you will come to love; without praising, you will praise such a fine fellow (the serpent); he, the villain, knows how to beguile the soul of a fair maiden with greetings; he, the destroyer, will charm a young bride with swan-like speech; he, insatiable, will entwine his beloved in passionate embraces; he, the barbarian, will melt her scarlet lips. From his kisses the fair maiden glows like a rosy dawn; from his greetings she blooms like a red sun. Without the serpent, the fair maiden sits in anguish, in sorrow; without him she does not look upon the light of day, without him she wastes away, wastes away!'

### ***THE SORCERER Vseslavich***

According to folk beliefs, the serpent-tempter does not fly to ordinary maidens, but to sorceresses and witches. He bestows magical powers upon the latter. One might recall the epic tale of Tugarin Zmeevich:

‘Through the garden, the green garden, walked the young princess Marfa Vseslavievna; She gathered stones to ward off the fierce serpent — The fierce serpent coils round her boot — green morocco leather. Round her silk stocking, its trunk strikes her white thigh; And at that moment the princess conceived and bore a child...’

The princess gave birth to the mighty bogatyr Volkhv Vseslavievich. On the day of his birth, the earth shook, the sea stirred... The glorious bogatyr performed many feats....

Here we see that the very name of the warrior, Volkhv Vseslavievich, indicates his affiliation with the priestly class of the Volkhvs.

Legends of this kind exist concerning real historical figures. Thus, according to the chronicles, Oleg the Prophet was born to his mother from a fiery serpent. A similar legend has been preserved concerning the birth of Alexander the Great. According to Titus Livius, he was born of a huge serpent, which was often seen in his mother’s bedchamber, but which would slither away as soon as people appeared. Suetonius reports that Emperor Augustus was conceived by a dragon. Augustus’s mother once fell asleep in the temple of Apollo. During the night, a dragon appeared to her and had intercourse with her. Thus was born the ‘divine’ Augustus.

Here we see the same story as with the ‘wolf’ lineage. In days gone by, tracing one’s lineage back to a dragon was considered an honour. It was a sign of divine birth. Such legends persisted until recently in a slightly different form. For instance, many people believed that if a star fell into someone’s courtyard, a maiden in that house had lost her virginity. This is precisely why the sites where stars and meteors fell were, until recently, considered sacred; childless wives would make pilgrimages there in the hope of conceiving children.

### ***THE HITNIK AND SNAKE AMULETS***

Until recently, in some regions of Russia, the slang term **‘hitnik’** (derived from the word ‘to kidnap’) was used to refer to the devil. Undoubtedly, this designation of the devil dates back to bygone times, when the devil was a fiery serpent. By kidnapping beautiful women, the serpent carries them off to the underworld, where his countless treasures and the water of life are kept. An unquenchable fire blazes within the mountain lairs. Indeed, the serpent itself later came to be known as ‘pekelnny’ (from ‘peklo’ — hell). Even today, the popular imagination often depicts the devil with a gaping maw and dragon’s wings. The dragon itself, in the popular imagination, was often depicted as having a human body but a dragon’s head. This interpretation links it, for example, to the werewolf, which has a human body and a wolf’s head. In one epic tale, the serpent is depicted as a bogatyr, with a serpent’s head on his shoulders. He rides a glorious bogatyr’s horse; a black raven (the thief of living water) sits on his shoulder, and behind him runs a greyhound (the wind-dog).

There are many ancient legends associated with snakes, which attribute a protective role to them. For instance, the Lusatians distinguish between three kinds of fiery serpents. Some of them bring gold from underground storehouses to their masters; others ensure a good grain harvest, the fertility of livestock and the safe birth of children; whilst the third type of serpent endows cows’ milk with healing powers and an excellent flavour. It also ensures that the cows remain healthy, well-fed and content. This division of the mythical serpent into three types is likely reflected in its original three-headed form. One head bestows wealth and power; another endows plants, animals and humans with the ability to bear fruit; and the third protects livestock and provides abundant moisture.

### ***HOW THE THREE-HEADED SERPENT WAS WORSHIPPED***

Perhaps such beliefs about the serpent can be traced back to the ancient Slavic deity Triglav. It is highly likely that the Aryans, too, may have worshipped a three-headed serpent. We still encounter certain vestiges of this attitude towards the fiery serpent in peasant communities today. For instance, the Czechs believe that a fiery-red serpent brings money, a blue serpent brings grain, and the house serpent (domovoy drak) brings milk and

butter for its master. Whoever kills the little serpent-master will lose their luck in livestock farming, and only weeds will grow in their fields. The Latvians explicitly refer to serpents as milk-giving mothers, nursing their betrothed children. The concepts of health, strength, vigour, beauty, youth, the healing of wounds, recovery from illness, as well as rejuvenation and resurrection from the dead, are firmly associated with living water.

Snake-shaped bracelets are found throughout Russia. This suggests that in times past, the snake was perceived as a protector rather than an oppressor. In Rus', snake heads were also embroidered in a single cluster on amulets. There were up to 12 of them. They sometimes framed the face... and these snake heads radiated out from it on long necks like rays. All this points to the solar origin of the sacred snakes. It was somewhat reminiscent of the head of the Greek Medusa Gorgon, framed by snakes... In Scythia, in one of the burial mounds of the Black Sea region, a bronze breastplate was found depicting the head of a goddess with snakes instead of hair, suggesting that an image identical to that of the Gorgon was widespread in the ancient world.

#### ***DRAGONS AND SNAKES: FORMER GODS?***

Indeed, in Russian folk tales we encounter a quite different attitude towards both the fiery dragon and its earthly counterpart — the snake. For instance, in Belarus there was a folk tale about a peasant who made offerings to a snake — he would regularly place a fried egg on the roof of his house. In gratitude, the snake would bring the man gold coins. The man grew rich and became a prominent merchant. Then one day, he forgot to place his usual treat on the roof for the snake. The annoyed snake flew in at midnight and, finding none of its favourite food, burnt down the whole house along with all his possessions. And so the man became as poor as a church mouse.

Another tale tells of a snake that was a healer. One day, a mother and her son were attacked by bandits. They killed the young son. The inconsolable mother, bent over the lifeless body, wept for her son for a long time,

until she suddenly noticed a dead little snake nearby. A live little snake slithered up to it, holding three leaves in its mouth. It placed these leaves on the dead snake's body, and it came back to life at once. And both little snakes slithered away straight away. The mother took these three leaves and placed them on her dead son's body. Instantly, his bloody wounds closed up, and her son came back to life, saying, 'How long have I been asleep?' Such archetypal views in regard towards the serpent are characterised by and to other peoples. For example, in the ancient Greeks, the serpent was regarded as a symbol of rebirth and new life. It is clearly no coincidence that Asclepius — the god of healing — was depicted with a staff entwined by serpents. He was the son of Apollo and had been endowed by the gods with the ability to rejuvenate the elderly and resurrect the dead. According to Greek legend, whilst he was resting from his labours in the shade of a spreading tree, a small snake suddenly slithered out and coiled itself around his staff. Asclepius took this as a bad omen and killed the snake. But immediately another snake slithered out, holding a miraculous herb in its mouth. This snake applied the herb to the slain snake, and it came back to life at once. Both snakes slithered away. After this, Asclepius believed in the omen and in his gift of healing. Hermes, the lord of the dead, also possesses a similar staff. He touches the dead with his staff entwined with snakes, and by this alone awakens them to eternal life.

### **THE MEDICINAL HERB REVIVES... AND KILLS**

There is also a German fairy tale about a young man who lost his beloved girlfriend. He weeps bitterly over her lifeless body. Just then, a snake appears, which he cuts in two with his sword. But another snake slithers out after it, holding a green leaf in its mouth. It touches this leaf to his slain girlfriend and the wound heals instantly... Then the young man revives his dead bride with this leaf.

A similar legend can be found in the epic tale of the bogatyr Potok. An underground (Goryan) serpent brings Potok living water, the power of which he first tests on a serpent he has slain, and then, in the same way, revives his young wife. Potok's wife belonged to the race of swan nymphs, which explains her changeable nature. She lives now in the world of the dead, now in the world of the living.

The similarity of these legends suggests a single source of their origin, which may date back to Aryan

times, when serpents and dragons were held in special esteem.

In the epic, the serpent is given the epithet 'Goryn' or 'underground', thereby indicating this serpent's connection with the fiery Serpent Gorynych.

The fairy-tale epic paints a picture of a dragon with three, six, or twelve heads. The more heads, the stronger the serpent. In folk prints, the fiery serpent is often depicted with six wings. An analogy immediately springs to mind with the 'six-winged Seraphim'. In Russian and Slovak fairy tales, the dragon's steed is capable of flying through the heavens, as it has twelve wings on its back. As for the fairy-tale herb that bestows healing, it is most likely the medyanitsa herb. It 'grows blind, regains its sight on Ivan's Day, and when it sees a person, it lunges at them like an arrow and pierces them through'. A similar belief exists about the medyanitsa snake. It is blind all year round and only regains its sight on Ivan's Day. It lunges at a person and pierces them, just like an arrow. Here we see how the plant (the wondrous flower) and the snake are likened to lightning or an arrow (it should be noted that the fiery snake itself is depicted with three arrows clamped in its jaws, whilst the dragon's tail represents a fourth arrow). This allows us to identify both the snake and the plant with Perun's flower, which blooms on the night of Ivan Kupala. It is on this very night that all manner of transformations and the resurrection of the dead are possible. The honeywort and the honey snake can pierce a person on this day and kill them.

## Chapter 16. THE SNAKE KING

In this chapter, the reader will find a tale of a greedy shepherd, the Snake King; they will learn how the snake's palace spins on a dog's heels; and that the Sun's kingdom is guarded by fiery snakes. Here, the story tells of snake grass, its miraculous properties, and how one can converse with snakes. It also discusses the snake festival held annually in Italy, and who rules the underworld. It turns out that the proverb 'Onions cure seven ailments' has a hidden mystical meaning. It also tells of the dangerous games played with humans by the Nagas — the secret rulers of the earth; of the location of Irij — the Slavic paradise; of the sun-wheel; of who dared to 'kill' the sun; of Veles — the sun god; of how long one must wait for the 'new Sun'; and of where the spiritual plasma flows...

### *THE GREEDY SHEPHERD*

Our ancestors likened a stay in the snake mountain to a stay in the afterlife. Thus, according to a Slovak fairy tale, a certain shepherd once witnessed a miracle: a multitude of snakes were crawling from all sides towards a certain mountain. Each snake sought out the grass growing near the mountain, plucked it, and touched the mountain with it. After that, the mountain's belly opened up, and the snake slithered nimbly inside. The shepherd said to himself: 'What a miracle! I wonder if I can get into this mountain in the same way?'

He plucked a blade of grass, touched it to the rock, and in that very instant a spacious entrance to the rock opened up before him. Not without fear, the shepherd went inside, ready to dash out at the slightest sign of danger. However, as soon as he entered the belly of the rock, the stone wall slammed shut behind him with a crash...

Inside the rock, it was as bright as day, thanks to an artificial sun shining beneath the cave's vaulted ceiling. All around, gold glistened—heaps of gold—in ingots, coins and gold jewellery... A multitude of snakes, coiled into balls, slept upon the gold. And on a golden table in the centre of the cave, a huge snake slept with a golden crown upon its head. Within the crown

, a serpent's stone shone with a wondrous light. It illuminated the entire cave like the sun. The shepherd longed to steal the precious stone, and, approaching the huge serpent, he removed the serpent's stone from the golden crown and slipped it into his pocket. Suddenly, everything went pitch black... The shepherd was suddenly overcome by a deep sleep. When he awoke, he saw a multitude of snakes all around him. The chief snake asked the shepherd: 'Was it you who took the stone from my crown? Answer me! If you give it back to me, I'll let you take as much gold from here as you can carry.' The shepherd handed the precious stone to the chief serpent. The serpent took the stone in its mouth and touched it to the rock, and at once the stone wall parted. The shepherd found himself outside with a heap of gold. 'Well,' thought the shepherd, 'I'm a rich man now!'... However, as soon as the shepherd ran out of money, he returned to the rock and once again entered its belly with the help of the magic herb. He stole the magic stone from the sleeping king of serpents' crown once more. But this time he decided not to return it to the snake. 'I can get out of here myself by touching the rock with the snake's stone, and I can take as much gold as I want,' he thought. As soon as the shepherd touched the wall with the snake's stone, the wall collapsed and buried him beneath it...

### ***THE SNAKE KING***

According to a Bulgarian legend, the snake king dwells in a deep burrow within a huge mountain. The king wears a crown on his head. A diamond shines within it like the sun. If one were to take possession of this crown with the diamond, one would become wise and immortal, like the king of snakes.

Among Armenians living within the borders of their historical homeland, there is a belief that all snakes have their own queen, who lives in the depths of Mount Ararat. The snake queen holds a magic stone in her mouth. And only twice a year does the queen release the stone from her mouth. She tosses it upwards beneath the vaults of the underground, and at that moment it shines like the sun, blinding with its light all the snakes gathered to witness this event. Eternal happiness will be granted to whoever makes their way unseen into the serpentine Mount Ararat and catches the magical stone in mid-air.

We can see that similar legends about the serpent's stone are widespread amongst various peoples of the Indo-European group. These legends are identical to those about the miraculous Cintamani stone, which are common in Tibet.

Similar legends are found in Ukraine. There, it is said that a giant serpent—the 'tsar-uzh'—lives deep within the earth. This serpent has two horns on its head: one made of gold, the other of diamond. Once a year, on the night of Ivan Kupala, the giant serpent crawls to the earth's surface. If you encounter it, quickly spread a red scarf or a red tablecloth before it; upon seeing this, the serpent will shed its horns. You must take these horns and bury them beneath two oak trees. One of them will soon wither, whilst the other will become covered in foliage and grow rapidly. The horn buried beneath the withered oak is deadly; it must not be touched. Anyone who touches it at any other time will be plunged into sleep and stupor. The horn buried beneath the flourishing oak, however, should be dug up. It brings happiness. It has the power to revive and cure fatal illnesses.

### ***THE SNAKE PALACE SPINS ON DOG'S HEELS***

We see that the two horns of the royal serpent are identical to the staff of Hermes. One horn is deadly. It turns all living things to stone. It is this horn that the king of the underworld uses to immobilise and put to sleep anyone who enters his realm. The other horn is life-giving. By touching a stone statue with it, one can make it move and breathe life into it.

The serpent stone is like the sun. It is the sun itself, swallowed by the mythical serpent Apophis at the end of its daily journey. However, the serpent is by no means a 'spawn of hell'. It is by no means the 'destroyer' of the sun. According to Slavic fairy tales, the sun stays in the serpent's beautiful palace at night and leaves it at dawn, rising into the sky. The tales speak of three serpent kingdoms and three serpent palaces: copper, silver and gold. The sun stays in each of the three kingdoms in turn during the night. The tales also speak of a pearl and a diamond serpent's palace. Thus, it is said of the diamond palace that it spins

like a windmill, and that from it one can see the entire universe — all the kingdoms of the earth, as clear as day... This palace, much like Baba Yaga's hut, turns on chicken legs or dog's heels... As for the serpent's copper palace, it is said to turn on a magpie's leg... there is no doubt that this palace is situated at the point where the Earth's axis passes. The serpent's pearl palace is like the dome of the starry sky, which moves in a circle.

We can also see echoes of these cosmogonies in the fairy tale about Ivan Poialov. It is said that in the land where Ivan lived, there was no day. Eternal night reigned there. This happened because the serpent had 'inhospitably' swallowed the sun. The hero set off for the place where the serpent's palace stood and spun round on one leg. The hero fought the serpent and defeated it. Smashing the enormous serpent's head with his mighty mace (lightning), he released the sun from the serpent's head, which immediately shone brightly in the sky.

### ***THE SUN KINGDOM IS GUARDED BY FIRE SNAKES***

The fairy tale of Vasilisa the Golden-Braided tells of living water. It is described with epithets such as heroic, powerful and serpentine.

Multi-headed serpents, spewing searing flames, lie at the entrance to the Sun Kingdom (Iriy, the realm of eternal summer) and guard access to the springs of living water there.

In fairy tales, one often encounters the image of a garden of paradise, where springs of living and dead water gush forth, and where rejuvenating apples grow. And around that garden, a huge serpent has coiled itself into a ring, so that its head and tail meet.

In the tale of Ivan the Naked and Mark the Runner, it is told that a fiery serpent showed the heroes the way to two sacred lakes. The heroes came to the shore of one lake and threw a green twig into the water. The twig burst into a bright flame and burned to ashes. They came to the shore of another lake and threw a burning ember into the water. It immediately sprouted and turned green with leaves. Thus, the tale contrasts a dead lake with fiery water and a lake with living water. This motif is also found in other tales, where snakes guard

barrels of potent (living) water in deep underground caverns. The serpents battle the heroes. In the heat of the battle, both sides rush into these caverns. Whoever reaches them first and drinks of that life-giving water will win the battle. Evidently, this gave rise to the belief in Russia that if someone is bitten by a poisonous snake, they must immediately run to the water and wash their wound in it. If, however, the snake that bit them reaches the water first, that person will die.

During a solar eclipse, it was believed that a dragon was stealing the sun. In such cases, it was necessary to cover the wells to protect the water from being spoiled or poisoned.

And according to German legends, dragons poison wells and thereby harm people and cows.

### **SNAKE GRASS**

Living water bestows great wisdom and foresight upon those who manage to drink it. It is worth making the 'journey' to the other world and 'battling' the fiery serpent for this.

Even ordinary porridge can become living water if cooked with snake grass.

In Little Russia, there was a tale about a shepherd and his hired helper — a shepherdess. One day, the young shepherd saw that the shepherd, having uttered the magic words, had summoned snakes from all around. Each of these snakes slithered up to the shepherd, holding an unknown herb in its mouth; after leaving it at his feet, it slithered away. The shepherd gathered all the herbs the snakes had brought him and boiled them into a porridge. He ate it and fell asleep, but before doing so he ordered the young shepherd to wash his pot, warning him: 'Mind you, don't taste my porridge!' The young shepherd could not resist: he scraped a full spoonful of the brew from the sides of the pot and ate it. And at that very moment, something marvellous happened to him! He could see and hear that every blade of grass on the steppe was swaying, leaning towards one another and whispering: 'I cure such-and-such an illness!', 'I possess such power!'. He decided to go over to the cart, and the oxen said: 'Here comes the one who's going to put us in the yoke!' In every sound that reached him, he heard intelligent words. And the wind whispered that the weather would soon change, and the trees were talking amongst themselves.

As we can see, attitudes towards the fiery serpent are by no means straightforward. The serpent is seen as a bearer of wisdom, a helper... and a protector. Indeed, in rural areas of the Czech Republic, it is said that if someone becomes wealthy, a 'plevnik' (fiery serpent) has taken up residence in their cottage. According to an ancient myth, during a thunderstorm, he is hurled by a bolt of lightning down the chimney onto the hearth and is granted 'residence'. According to an old Czech belief, every cottage has its own house snake, which sometimes shows itself to people. In some villages, people still claim that it is not just one plevnik living in the house, but a husband, wife and their little children. As soon as the husband-snake dies, the master of the house dies immediately, and if the wife-snake dies, the master's wife dies. The same applies to their little ones. In Belarus, these snakes are called house snakes (zmei). They protect the family from all misfortune and ensure wealth and prosperity.

### ***TALKING TO SNAKES***

Eastern deities are often adorned with a necklace... made of venomous snakes. The snakes wrap themselves very picturesquely around the deity's neck in coils (such is the case, for example, with Shiva, the Lord of the Universe). It would appear that snakes can indeed serve as ornaments and cause their owner no trouble whatsoever.

In one Indian village, the cobra is particularly revered. At the entrance to the village stands a small temple where services are held involving cobras, and worshippers feed the reptiles sweets and milk. The cobras behave very peacefully during these rituals. Over the years, not a single attack by this venomous snake on a human has been recorded in the vicinity of this village.

The islands of the Malay Archipelago are home to a venomous snake known as the temple kuffia. This pit-headed viper got its name because it inhabits the famous Snake Temple on the island of Penang, near the west coast of Malacca. Worshippers and temple staff gather snakes from all over the surrounding area and bring them to the temple, which the snakes regard as their domain. Thousands of reptiles sit on the walls and buildings, hang from tree branches and

rest on the offering bowls. The locals feed and worship the snakes, and in return, the snakes repay them in kind. There has not been a single recorded instance of a snake biting a worshipper or tourist in the temple or its surroundings.

### ***SNAKE FESTIVAL IN ITALY***

In Italy, in the village of Cocullo, a snake festival is held every year in early May. A couple of weeks before the festival, locals and tourists wishing to take part scour the surrounding hills in search of marsh vipers. They catch them with their bare hands, without any fear of being bitten, take them home and keep them in wicker baskets, regularly feeding them frogs and milk. During the festival, the locals, carrying their cold-blooded friends in their arms, make their way to the local cathedral, near which a statue of Saint Domenico stands. People hang their pets onto the statue. The snakes seem to be just waiting for this. They climb onto the statue and wrap themselves around its neck, shoulders and head. Once the prayer service is over, the festival-goers head for the hills and release the snakes. During the festival, even small children play with the snakes, and nobody bats an eyelid. Everyone knows that the local snakes do not bite...

This festival is very ancient. According to legend, several thousand years ago there were swarms of snakes in these parts, and they caused great trouble for the local shepherds. Almost every day, sheep and people died from their bites. The shepherds turned to the priest of Apollo for help, and he, having made a sacrifice to his god, declared that from then on the snakes would no longer bite livestock or people. And the people would have to hold a snake festival every year, during which they would interact with the snakes without fear... As we can see, the tradition lives on to this day.

### ***WHO IS THE RULER OF THE UNDERWORLD?***

Some individuals are also able to establish trusting relationships with snakes. For instance, according to legend, Sergius of Radonezh decided to build a monastery on a hill known as 'Snake Hill'. Sergius 'asked' the snakes to leave this beautiful spot, and they obeyed the saint without question, never appearing in the vicinity of the Sergius Lavra again.

However, there are cases of a different nature. A local resident of a small Kyrgyz town used to kill snakes whenever and wherever he could. To do so, he would go out of his way to seek them out. And the snakes decided to take revenge on their tormentor. They would appear before him when he least expected it. Those around him got the impression that the snakes had launched a real hunt for this man. As a result, the man was bitten by two venomous snakes at once, one of which was a cobra and the other a viper. It was not possible to save him.

It is by no means news that one can engage in a mental dialogue with various animals. Snakes are no exception. Shamans know how to talk to snakes and establish trusting relationships with them.

The renowned scientist M. Harner once decided to conduct an experiment. He drank a shamanic brew prepared for him by the Konibo Indians. He fell into a cataleptic state, during which he communicated with the spirits of reptiles. These spirits told the scientist that they were the true masters of the Earth. And they are very displeased that humans consider only themselves to be intelligent creatures, and stubbornly fail to notice cold-blooded creatures. The scientist had to summon all his willpower to break free from the embrace of the reptilian spirits...

After Harner came round, he told the shaman about the reptiles' discontent. However, the shaman merely smiled at this, saying: 'They always say that; in reality, they are the masters of the underworld.'

### ***'THE BOW OF THE SEVEN AILMENTS'***

Certain vestiges of the worship of the fire serpent can be seen in so-called 'everyday magic'. For instance, in Ukraine, it is traditional to embroider

rushnyks. These are long white cloths with protective patterns along the edges. Clearly, this is a metaphor for the fire serpent. Similarly, the long knitted rugs in peasant huts are a metaphor for the same thing. Few people realise that the well-known carpeted path evokes the image of the fire serpent.

In Ukraine, onions and garlic are held in particular high regard. It is believed that they protect against all manner of evil spirits. In Galicia and Little Russia, on Christmas Eve, they are placed in front of each place setting. Sometimes the Christmas table is covered with hay, into which three heads of garlic and twelve onions are placed. In this way, they call upon the ancestral spirits to take the family under their protection for the whole year.

Garlic and onions do indeed resemble a snake. Around Christmas, people would search among the garlic heads for one containing twelve cloves. These twelve cloves of garlic symbolise the twelve months of the year. Garlic and onions produce green shoots. Since ancient times, these shoots have been identified by the people with a snake; whilst the onion or garlic bulb itself is associated with the sun. It is no coincidence that bunches of onions and garlic are stored in a dark storeroom, which corresponds to the period when the winter sun is 'imprisoned'. Indeed, even today in Russia people say: 'Onions ward off seven ailments.' It is believed that onions and garlic protect against all manner of illness and evil spells. Undoubtedly, this belief is linked not only to bioflavonoids and vitamin C, but also to faith in the protective power of the plant as a talisman... The white flesh of onions and garlic is likened to the sun, whilst the green shoots are likened to nature's springtime blossoming. Clearly, white salt and lard are also associated with the sun and its protective function. This is eloquently and unambiguously illustrated by the similarity of the words 'sun', 'salt' and 'lard'...

In Russia, the white snake has long been regarded as the embodiment of the sun. To anyone who saw such a snake, the secret language of animals and plants was revealed. They became 'as wise as a snake'.

### ***'I SHALL RISE, I SHALL GO TO THE SEA...'***

People turned to the fiery serpent, seeking help in love. Thus, one folk love spell goes:

‘I shall rise, I shall go out into the open field, into the wide expanse towards the blue ocean. By that blue ocean lies the fiery serpent; he is preparing to set ablaze the mountains and valleys and swift rivers... I shall draw nearer, I shall bow low. O fiery serpent! Set not ablaze the mountains and valleys, nor the swift rivers; but set ablaze the red maiden (name) in her seventy-seven joints, in her seventy-seven veins and her single spinal cord, throughout her entire being, so that she may be moved and desire it; let it take her by day under the sun, by night under the moon, so that she may yearn and grieve for the servant such-and-such (name).’

Evidently, the ‘fiery serpent’ here refers to those fiery spirits which drew condemnation from medieval theologians. Thus, as early as 420 CE, Saint Augustine wrote:

‘Sylvans and fauns (whose appearance resembled that of humans, but who were hairy and had hooves or paws instead of legs), commonly called “incubi” (male spirits), often commit ungodly assaults on women and satisfy their lust with them.’

In the work *\*The Malleus Maleficarum\**, this point is elaborated upon: ‘The demon, being exceedingly cunning and skilful, takes the form of a succubus (a female spirit) and seduces a man, doing so not for the sake of lust, but for the sake of sin, in order to harm the Lord and mankind. Then the succubus, not wishing to enter into a union with a woman that is unnatural to her being, passes the seed to the incubus who attends the witch, and the latter seduces the woman under the appropriate constellation, favourable for the birth of a child. A child born in this way is tall and strong. He is born of a woman from a man’s seed, but with the aid of devilish arts, and therefore bears the devil’s mark. Both the child and the parents should be burned, so as to avoid the devil’s machinations in the future.’

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| <b><i>DANGEROUS GAMES</i></b> |
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According to the legends of ‘ancient times’, fairies and elves used to play similar tricks on gullible simpletons. They would steal a man’s seed and use it to impregnate a woman of their choosing. She would give birth to an elf or a fairy, whom they would carry off to their realm immediately after birth...

It also turns out that elves and fairies have not given up their mischief even today, in our enlightened age. According to a statement by a certain Englishman named Loflin, a

“a bewitchingly beautiful fairy”. He was so overwhelmed by her beauty and passion that he preferred to spend the night at friends’ houses.

Similar accounts can be heard on the other side of the world — in India. For instance, a Brahmin from South India recounted his younger years; when he was fascinated by occult Tantrism, a naked visitor ‘of a not entirely human appearance’ began to appear to him at night. A more experienced friend explained to him that this was

*Mohini* — a demon of the underworld. She endows her lovers with incredible sexual power. In the course of a single night, she can take on 18 different forms and may demand that her lover satisfy all of them. She also protects her lover from enemies and fulfils his desires. However, if a man betrays Mohini with an earthly woman, there will be no mercy for him. He will choke on his own blood, which will gush from his throat for no apparent reason.

### ***THE NAGAS — THE SECRET RULERS OF THE EARTH***

Hindus believe that deep beneath the earth dwell the Nagas — semi-divine beings with serpentine bodies and one or more human heads. The Nagas can change their appearance at will. Unrecognised by anyone, they live amongst humans, marrying men and women. Moreover, they choose great kings and heroes as their spouses. Their enchanting beauty, as well as their ability to change their appearance, opens every door to them. In secret, they can influence the decisions made by rulers in their favour. The Nagas also possess the ability to revive the dead.

It is to them that the entire underworld — Patala — belongs. In their underground capital, Bhogavati, they guard all the earth's untold treasures. Those among humans who discover the secret of the Nagas face certain death.

According to ancient legends, Nagas form romantic relationships with both men and women. The descendants of the Nagas from these mixed marriages also possess remarkable abilities. They become priests and magicians. From the very moment of their birth, they are connected to both worlds: the earthly and the underworld. An ancient legend has survived, stating that, according to ancient manuscripts, the Khmer king was required to spend every night with a multi-headed Naga woman and satisfy her insatiable lust. The prosperity of the entire country depended on this. The king would descend into the underworld of the nagas by clinging to a magical tree, which would sink into the underworld every night and rise back to the surface every morning.

#### ***WHERE IS IRIY LOCATED?***

The Hindus have a degree of kinship known as the so-called solar dynasty. Tracing one's lineage back to the sun is highly honourable. The solar dynasty comprises kings, heroes and common people.

According to Slavic mythology, however, the solar paradise — Irij — is guarded by fiery serpents. It is these creatures that are in the habit of entering into intimate relationships with kings, queens, sorceresses, heroes... As we recall, these mixed marriages give rise to mighty heroes bearing the traits of dragons. They are endowed with special abilities. They can become invisible at will, fly through the heavens at breakneck speed, and their weapons possess the astonishing power to both kill and bring back to life.

The location of the Slavic paradise may be pinpointed to a specific region. As already mentioned, countries such as Iran, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Phrygia and Arabia sound similar to the word 'Iriy'. The word 'Aryan'. Perhaps the ancestral homeland of the Aryans was situated precisely in the region of Asia Minor and the Middle East. At least, that is the view held by some scholars. Thus, the work of Academician T.V. Gamkrelidze and

V.V. Ivanov, \*The Indo-European Language and the Indo-Europeans\*, points to the Near East as a possible region where the Indo-European community originated in the 5th–4th millennia BC. The homeland of the Indo-Europeans is envisaged as a region with a mountainous landscape. This explains such folk characters as Zmey Gorynych, who dwells in a mountain, and the Fiery Serpent, who dwells in the mouth of a volcano.

### ***THE SUN-WHEEL***

The metaphor of the ‘sun-wheel’ is also associated with the Indo-Europeans. In this context, one might recall the Slavic custom of lighting a wheel and setting it afloat on the riverbank during the festival of Ivan Kupala. This symbolises the ritual ‘burial’ of the sun... During Maslenitsa in Siberia, a sledge is paraded with a spinning wheel mounted on it. A young man, dressed in a woman’s dress and wearing a kokoshnik, is seated on it, personifying the sun in female form. At the same time, Kolyada — the newborn sun — is celebrated.

In folk riddles, the sun is called the ‘spinning ball’: ‘Across the dawn’s horizon rolls the spinning ball; no one can go round it or drive past it.’ And even today, people say: ‘The sun has set.’

In an ancient Russian fairy tale about the bogatyr Eruslan, the figure of ‘the free Tsar of the Fiery Shield’. This tsar rides forth on an eight-legged horse, much like the Norse Odin, who possessed the magnificent eight-legged steed Sleipnir. Here we see an ancient metaphor for the sun. The symbol of the sun was a wheel with eight spokes or a circle formed by eight writhing fiery serpents.

The legend of Eruslan tells of an enemy who came to the land of Rus, ravaged it, and took twelve heroes captive, gouged out their eyes, and imprisoned them in a damp dungeon. When the warrior Erulan learnt of this, he set off across the still waters and warm seas — to the Free Tsar, the Fiery Shield and the Flaming Spear. This tsar neither burns in fire nor drowns in water; he breathes fire and burns all his enemies. On his way, Eruslan descended into the underworld and retrieved the magic sword hidden there. With that sword, he split the free king

in two and extracted his gall. Having accomplished this feat, he returned to Rus'. He freed the twelve bogatyr and anointed their eyes with the gall he had taken from the Fire King. The bogatyr immediately regained their sight...

### ***WHO DARED TO 'KILL' THE SUN?***

It is clear that the twelve bogatyr represent the twelve months of the year. The bogatyr's regaining of their sight, as well as the symbolic act of sacrificing the Fire King, signifies the 'killing' of the sun and its rebirth. The bile, meanwhile, is a metaphor for sunlight.

Just as, according to Indian myths, the gods sacrificed the cosmic man Purusha and created the universe from his body parts, so too did Eruslan cleave the sun god in two and, through this act, bring forth sunlight.

It should also be noted that in Rus', the sun was depicted at sunrise as a newborn infant, and at sunset as a grandfather with a golden head and a silver beard. Thus, the sun perished and was reborn not only twice a year, but every morning and every evening. This echoes the myths of the Egyptians, in which the sky goddess Nut gives birth to the sun-child, who travels across the sky in a golden boat. In the evening, however, the sun perishes. Experts maintain that the cult of the sun became established in Egypt in the 16th century BC. It is quite possible that this myth was borrowed by an Egyptian pharaoh from the Near East. The Hittites, who lived in that region at precisely that time, practised a cult of the Sun-King. The sun was then referred to as nothing other than 'My Solar Deity'. In the hymns to the sun, it was stated in particular that the sole ruler of the universe created all living beings, including humans. This creation took place in several stages...

Among the Hindus, a tradition has survived concerning the existence of 'other suns', which successively gave birth to the ancestors of beasts, gods, giants, demons and humans. Modern people live in the age of the seventh sun. When the eighth sun arrives, a white king will come to earth, from whom a new humanity will descend... According to Hindu beliefs, the 'previous' black sun is currently located underground, to which the inhabitants there—the nagas—pray.

## ***VELES — THE SUN GOD***

The hymns of the \*Rigveda\* preserve traces of an ancient myth about how the Sun King, Surya, fell out with Indra, the god of thunder. After many years of struggle, Indra prevails and, to mark his victory, fits a wheel from the Sun King's chariot onto his own war chariot... Evidently, it is this very 'fifth' wheel that the Slavs lower from the bank on the night of Ivan Kupala. It turns out to be unnecessary to the Sun King.

A similar myth about the struggle between the god of thunder and the sun god is also found in Hurrian mythology.

In this connection, it is possible to suggest that the Russian Veles, against whom the god of thunder Perun is constantly fighting, was not always a 'god of cattle' and the ruler of the underworld. It is possible that Veles once reigned in the heavens and represented an aspect of the Sun God (if our assumption is correct, then the name Veles is cognate with the prefix

'*vele*', which ultimately signifies rotation, twisting or a wheel). However, having been cast down from the heavens by the thunder god Perun, he hid from his devastating bolts of lightning first in a tree, then in a stone, then in a human being, and only then descended into the underworld.

A similar myth is found in the 'Rigveda', where Arjuna (according to Sanskrit, the proper name Arjuna is read as 'Silver'), as the embodiment of noble metals, fights the sun god Surya and drags him down from the heavens, confining him to an underground dungeon. It is there, in the bowels of the earth, that metals 'mature' and 'grow'. And it is precisely with these subterranean 'treasuries' that the 'cult of metals' is associated.

Thus, 'the god of all Rus' Veles is transformed from a pitiful outcast of the underworld into a deposed king, imprisoned by his enemies and adversaries. Veles' serpentine nature precisely emphasises and reveals his connection with the sun.

## ***HOW LONG MUST WE WAIT FOR THE 'NEW SUN'?***

In this regard, there is another surprising aspect. The fiery serpents guarding the entrance to the solar paradise are somehow involved in the birth of mighty warriors, heroes and, to put it in modern terms, the 'new man'. Evidently, the division of history into 'sun periods' corresponds to the emergence of different types of people on earth. It is hardly surprising that if, during the time of 'one sun', a single human race appears on the planet, then during the time of the 'next sun' it degenerates and turns into animals — the very same monkeys, wolves, bears, and so on. In that case, according to mythological motifs and occultism, animals are indeed the ancestors of humans and can serve as their totemic living talismans.

So, holding our breath, we must wait for the 'new sun' to appear, which will bring a new generation of humans to the planet. What will become of the current generation after that — only God knows. I wouldn't want to panic, but perhaps modern humanity is degenerating... God grant that I am wrong in this case... Whether the new 'gods' will want us as their 'servants', I do not know either.

However, if we follow the proposed logical sequence of phantasmagoria, then human civilisations on Earth appear cyclically, and they certainly do not originate from a 'tribe' of apes, nor even from 'tribe' of wolves, bears, swans and snakes. The beasts lose something anthropomorphic that makes them human. It seems that this 'something' is the human mind.

However, the 'new solar dynasty' does not appear suddenly either, but during the next cycle of the gods' settlement of the Earth. Perhaps these gods really do live on the sun — in this solar paradise. The fact that they do not burn up at such temperatures indicates that they do not and cannot have biological bodies; nor do they need them!

### ***WHERE DOES SPIRITUAL PLASMA FLOW?***

In the form of fiery emanations (fiery serpents), they descend to Earth at certain intervals. In the guise of beautiful, radiant young men and women, they capture people's attention. Why not suppose that these god-men, who have only just

born of the solar deity, are able to teleport their embryos — ‘golden eggs’ — into the wombs of earthly women (myths telling of the birth of the first god-man from a golden egg hint at this). In this way, earthly mothers become surrogate mothers, so to speak, for the ‘new generation of gods’. Within the wombs of earthly women, a foetus matures that bears no relation to the genetics of earthlings... This is recounted, for example, in biblical myths, which tell of the glorious race of giants who ‘began to go in to the daughters of men’. The fact that, in principle, any woman can become a surrogate mother is, by and large, hardly news... Indeed, not only humans but even animals are capable of carrying in their wombs a foetus that does not belong to them. A good example is recent research by Chinese and American scientists. Both groups, independently of one another, succeeded in growing a human foetus in the womb of a pig. It is hard to believe, but experts in this field have acknowledged that this is indeed a fact.

Another question is how completely new genetic material — the fertilised embryo of a ‘new human’ — ends up in the womb of an earthly woman. Here we must admit that a miraculous factor is at work. Evidently, our god-like forefathers possessed the ability to materialise and implant their embryo into the bodies of earthly women. Otherwise, there would be no solar dynasty. On the Sun, neither bodies, nor embryos, nor reproductive organs are needed. Fiery spiritual plasma in the form of thought-forms flows from one state into another and thereby animates this dead world beneath the Sun.

## **In lieu of an afterword. THE FIRE-LIKE NATURE OF MAN**

It is evident that the following should be added to all that has been said as a brief postscript. Personally, I find not only the appearance of gods and humans (of a new formation) on earth, linked to the implantation of the embryo in the wombs of future mothers, to be miraculous, but also the very existence of the material (biological) body.

Modern Hindus, like their Indo-Aryan ancestors, believe that the material body exists because a fire burns constantly within it. As soon as this fire goes out, a person dies. The inner fire constantly needs fuel. All living beings eat and breathe, with the exception of the most primitive (viruses). This is precisely why yogis believe that one can prolong one's life by holding one's breath. According to yogis, the number of inhalations and exhalations is strictly regulated for each person. In principle, this does not contradict the fundamentals of physiology. As we know, there is a theory in biology according to which food is 'burned' in the mitochondria — the energy-producing powerhouses of cells. It 'burns' in the presence of oxygen, which is supplied from the lungs to the body's cells. Thus, if one practises breath retention, as, for example, Butsko advised, it is actually possible to prolong one's life. The metabolic rate decreases and the body's 'resource' is not used up so quickly...

Among other things, we have all heard of such an astonishing phenomenon as pyrogenesis. This is when people, for no apparent reason, burst into white flames in a matter of seconds. Sometimes not even the bones remain of the body, just a handful of ashes in the truest sense of the word. How is this possible? We know that the human body is 75 per cent water. To cremate a body in a crematorium furnace takes three hours at a temperature of 350 degrees!

Sometimes yogis who have attained enlightenment burn their bodies through the power of thought. At least, that is what is said in the Upanishads and the Puranas.

Yogis believe that in this case the jiva (soul) goes straight from  
'solar paradise' — into the 'boundless expanse of Brahman'...

If we take such views as our starting point, then life itself seems like a  
miraculous phenomenon, testifying to the existence of an intelligent creator!

\* \* \*

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